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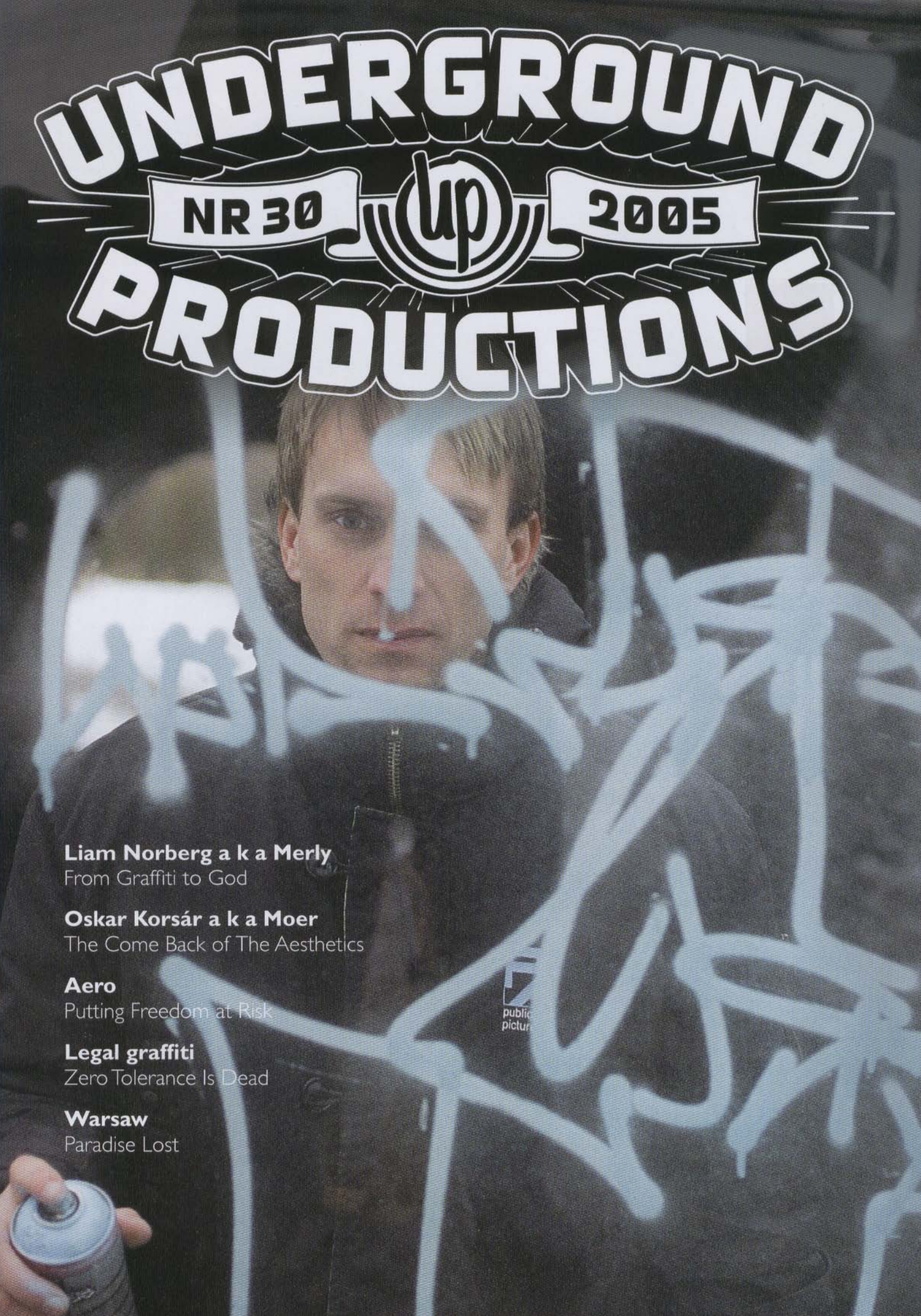
UNDERGROUND
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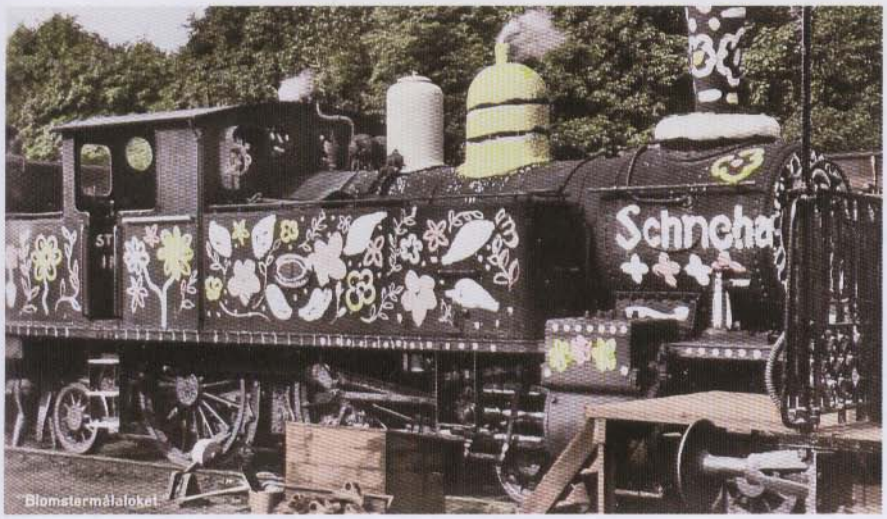
In UP 29 we wrote about the See Ya Soon Wall. After the release of the issue the crew Special Blend did a big white logotype over the pieces by Atom, Moral, Show, Wagon and Delight. A couple of days later Show, Moral and The One painted over Special Blend. "I mostly thought it was fun that they went over us", says Moral. "But that kind of shit we had to go over. They had been welcolme if they had done decent color pieces." UP haven't been able to get any photo of the Special Blend piece but you can see it in the background.



Locomotive painted in Särö, Sweden 1952.

A Never-Ending Journey

An important facet of graffiti is the battle for attention. Writers use all sorts of terms to categorize their competitors: King, Toy, Wanna-bee and Has-been. In this issue we interview Merley and Moer, two has-beens who have made themselves familiar outside the world of graffiti. But is there such a thing as a has-been? Almost all those who have written graffiti remain writers in one way or another, even though they may not be so active in the field. Neither Merley nor Moer have shelved their cans for good.

I myself quit several times. The first was in 1992, three years after my first real piece. I thought I had achieved what I wanted: I could do a good piece. I sold the cans that had been so hard to get. A few months later, when the urge returned, I realized I was just at the beginning of a long journey to develop and polish a personal style. Thirteen years and several interruption later, I have come to realize the journey never ends.

Malcolm Jacobson

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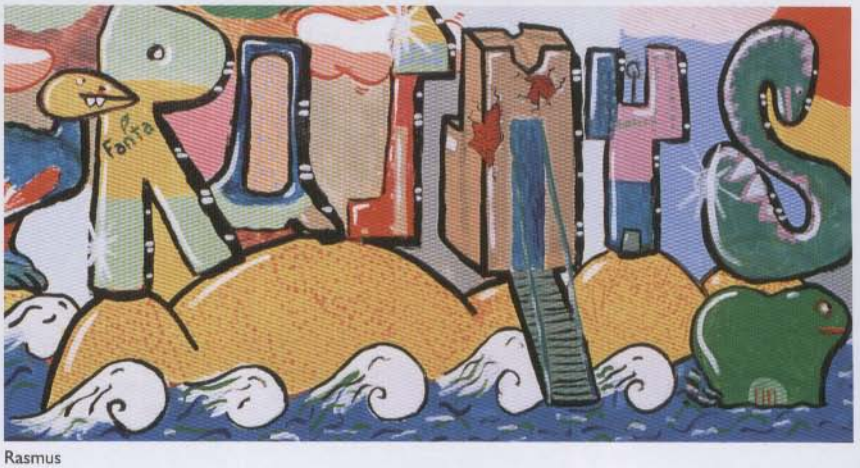

Rasmus

Graffiti is for kids

In the Summer of 2004 a week course in art for children was held in the community of Elsinor, Denmark, during their Culture Festival, which otherwise included all kinds of arrangements from dance and theatre to warhammer.

Magnus F. Clausen, who was leading the course, had free hands on deciding the workshop's topic, he was asked if he could make it sort of streety, due to the growing attention and popularity towards street art.

"I just wasn't allowed to call it a 'graffiti' workshop", says Magnus. "This was to avoid misunderstandings with the financers of the project, who probably weren't interested in giving money to a project officially about graffiti. So I decided on the title "street painting", which suited me fine."

Three girls and two boys aged ten to thirteen participated. They had no experience of graffiti.

"When we started out the first day and I told them that they were supposed to draw the letters of their own names, they all stared weirdly at me. But after a little bit of explanation and two examples with my own name to show what they could do and what possibilities there are in drawing letters, interest grew. It came as the easiest thing in the world to make a swing here and turn there. The kids' letters turned into monsters, houses, castles, and many other funny things."

First they worked on drawing letters and characters on paper for two days.

"Some of the drawings I made them do on a deadline of 30 seconds to two minutes, to help them to overcome their perfectionism and get the process speeded up. Other exercises consisted of drawing letters and characters made out of a shape a classmate had made."

The drawings were a starting fundament for the last three days of painting on wooden plates. The kids had to find their two best drawings for the production, one with their name and one with a character.

The kids' letters turned into monsters, houses and castles.

"After sketching up, we took out all the colors and old leftovers of plastic paint, and started to work. There was a good atmosphere and we all had a great time fooling around, listening to music, and painting. I was only there as a helping hand, suggesting what to do when they were lost, and trying to keep the enthusiastic atmosphere up."

Sophie

"Do Not Fear Queers" and "Do Not Bomb 3rd world" stickers from the crew Stick Up NYC.

Watch the Closing Doors

Between New York City bus shelters and the subway cars themselves, you'd think you were riding the corporate and not the public transportation system. Competition for the use of public space is fierce, the game is rigged and the winners are almost always corporations. The use of public space outside of the logic of big business is discouraged, if not outright criminalized. The degradation of public space into corporate space combined with the US government's continuing war provoked a group of artists to put a dissenting message back into the mix on New York City subway cars. UP asked an anonymous representative of the group, which is known as **Stick Up NYC** about their message.

"'Do Not Bomb Iraq' is one message in a series of stickers ranging from 'Do Not Fear Queers' to 'Do Not Build Prisons'. The stickers were first thrown up in the winter of 2002 and they continue to battle with the corporate and military interests on the walls of the subway cars. Same goes for our public streets, giant oil-and-blood-guzzling SUVs kill our environment, our children, and take even more of the limited public space into the realm of militarized corporate privatization. Basically we're killing ourselves with our hubris, greed and aggressive and ostentatious egoism. Let's break it down.

For every Hummer bought in the United States an American soldier is killed in Iraq, for every Lincoln Navigator bought in the USA one hundred Iraqi civilians are murdered. We need to take back the streets and reverse this flow."

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"I like to bomb. It expresses so much style and feeling with very simple means", says Aero. His work can be spotted all over his hometown Gothenburg.

"I put my freedom at risk"

Lately, conditions for graffiti writing have changed drastically in Gothenburg. But the vandal squad and prison sentences don't scare Aero off.

Text: Björn Almqvist

It is a grey Sunday morning at Röda Sten in Gothenburg. On each side of the old furnace building, which is now used as an arts centre, people are writing graffiti. One of them is **Kid**, who is making a large IGS piece in white with red lines. His buddy Aero is keeping him company, but isn't painting himself.

"I rarely write legally. It can be a nice way to chill in a social way, to piece with some friends, with some hot dogs, and a few beers. But I could do the same stuff at a football match. It's kind of just a nice thing," says Aero.

For a few years in the late 90s and early 2000s, Gothenburg was a relatively safe place to write illegally. Graffiti crimes were not high priority with the Gothenburg police. But in the framework of tougher property damage legislation, a vandal squad has been formed. In the last year a couple of prison sentences have been handed out.

Since then, many of the city's writers have been keeping a low profile. Aero is one of a few exceptions.

Alongside his studies, Thai boxing and touring with his punk band, he somehow manages to scrape together the time to keep the name Aero visible, mainly with tags and throw-ups.

"I do everything in graffiti except write legally. But mainly I like to bomb. You use a completely different form language than when you do big pieces. It expresses so much style and feeling with very simple means. And apart from the artistic bit, there's some action as well. I like the adrenalin rush you get painting a train. I think it's fun."

The situation has changed a lot for writers in Gothenburg lately. How does this affect you?

"Well, I don't bring my cell phone if I'm going to do panels, for instance. Then they can check where I've been. But apart from that, it hasn't affected me that much."

Does it worry you that you might get sentenced?

"Of course it does. But at the same time, I think it's worth the risk."

How come?

"Because I really like bombing. And I guess because I'm not really afraid of getting caught."

Aero knows full well what could happen. He has already been caught and served a sentence for crimes linked to his leftist views.

Airo throw-ups, Gothenburg

Aero, Gothenburg

Aero

Aero

Aero

Airo, Gothenburg

"In a way, it would feel really unnecessary being in jail for graffiti. But the thought doesn't scare me as much now as when I didn't know what it was like."

"Of course, jail isn't a bed of roses, but the prisoners aren't much different from people in general. If you're pleasant and don't have too much of an attitude, you make friends there too."

What motivates you?

"Earlier, it was to be the most up, that you should see one of my tags wherever you went. If I hadn't done a piece in a couple of days, I felt no one knew who I was any more. That's not so important now. I don't feel compelled to do it the way I used to."

Is that because you are more secure?

"Yes, I think so. And prison gave me a new perspective on life. It doesn't have to be prison, but if you have an accident or something, you realize what's important in life. And it's not important to me that a 13-year-old on the internet knows who I am. But let's be honest, it's still nice to get cred for stuff. That's a motivator too. A lot of people say they only write for themselves, but I find that hard to believe."

Aero hasn't been involved in writing very long. He encountered graffiti fairly late in life. He grew up in what he describes as a "white trash area" outside Gothenburg, and none of his friends were interested in graffiti. When he was in his mid-teens, he moved to a suburb project with a high rate of immigration, but never came into contact with spray cans there either.

Aero, Gothenburg

Aero. One of few legal pieces

"All my friends were interested in other types of criminal activity. It was more a money thing. You had to be someone, with a big stereo and a car. And of course you don't get that by writing graffiti. Even today, none of my friends have any moral objections to my writing graffiti, but they don't get why I break the law without making any money out of it."

What do you think about that?

"Of course nobody would turn down becoming a millionaire, and I see their point. But I see it as two different things. Graffiti won't make you rich, but it's another kind of motivation. A means of expression."

Aero's first significant encounter with graffiti took place in the late 90s when he saw a piece at Hisingen in Gothenburg by the writer **Cascade**.

"I thought it was really cool. So I got some pretty crap cans and started writing on a power relay in the woods. I thought I was going to do some wildstyle burner there, and of course it kind of failed. I didn't know anybody who was into graffiti, so that first year I was all on my own. Then I found out that you needed special caps and sent for some from the States. Two months later I got these lousy caps that didn't work. I didn't realize you needed different caps for different cans."

"Prison gave me a new perspective on life."

Though his first tentative tries were fairly unsuccessful, Aero's new interest kept up. Once he had solved the elementary practical problems, he quickly progressed. It wasn't long before he decided to leave the forest and transfer his work to the city and the trains. Around the year 2000, the Gothenburg graffiti scene saw the emergence of a new generation of writers when crews such as OOPS and VNS (Vandals) had to cede some space on the trams to F-UPS and IGS (*Ingen Går Säker*, or No-One is Safe).

"Gothenburg is quite a small town, and there aren't many places to do trains in. So for a while, there were a lot of disputes about space. But later, the older groups basically quit writing. They just stayed home brooding about people doing trains on their turf. Then F-UPS and IGS divided places, and it worked pretty well. But now, the same quarrels are starting up again. A lot of those who started writing about the same time I did have started cutting down and whining about a lot of little kids writing on their train places."

What do you think about these rows?

"When it comes to train writing, some people will always want their own yard. It's an unavoidable problem. But I can't forbid people to go writing, or if I did I couldn't police it. It would take so much energy I wouldn't be able to paint myself. I understand that people get pissed off. So do I when people write in my places. It increases the likelihood of me getting caught. Every time I do a panel, I'm risking a hell of a lot. I'm putting my freedom at risk. So it's a sensitive issue."

Aero, Gothenburg

Aero, Kid, Gothenburg

Aero, Gothenburg

Aigis, Gothenburg tram

Airo

Airo

Aero, Aero, Aero

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Liam Norberg painting in Norrköping in September 2004: "It was a whole new world".

From Graffiti to God: A Seeker's Tale

Liam Norberg is one of the most fabled Swedish graffiti writers: One of Stockholm's best writers in the 1980s, a national martial arts competitor and, later, a hardened criminal. He found God during a long prison sentence, and is deeply devout today.

Text: Tobias Barenthin Lindblad

"I'm a seeker. I was a seeker in hip-hop culture, I was a seeker in crime, I was a seeker in the martial arts field. When I go in for something, I go all the way. When I let God into my life, a piece of the puzzle fell into place."

We are sitting in a late-night café in Stockholm. Around us is a sea of kids too young to get into the bars. Liam Norberg sits in front of me, tucking into apple pie and custard. Liam's hair is well-cut, with blonde streaks, and he is dressed in a large b-boy style parka. A pair of new Puma trainers sticks out from under the table. Liam is very fit, and proud of having recently won a Tae Kwon Do tournament.

What were you seeking?

"The truth about myself, and the truth in a broader sense. Nowadays, I think that the meaning of our existence is to get reconciled with God. From the day I first prayed to God for forgiveness and mercy, I entered a new space, and found myself close to Him. It's a great calm in the storm.

Liam produces a photo and places it on the table. It is his first piece in nearly ten years, a **Merly** done in September of 2004 in the coal harbor of Norrköping. Beside the piece, Liam has placed some lyrics from a **Kanye West** song: *The Devil tries to pull me down, but Jesus walks with me.*

What was it like, doing your first piece in ten years?

"As we entered the coal harbor, I saw hundreds of people standing around writing. It was unreal to think graffiti had gotten so big! Paint that didn't run, new caps – a whole new world," says Liam, looking happy.

Have you sketched anything since you quit writing?

"You never get away from graffiti. If you have a pen to hand, you start sketching letters automatically. I always end up sketching a tag or something, especially the letters M and Z."

What do you think about modern graffiti?

"I don't know what you call this new style that sticks out in all directions; I'm not really into that. Some stuff is very cool from a technical point of view. But I like the stuff that has its roots in the 80s."

Liam expresses himself carefully (he has given up swearing), and it is hard to look away from him when he talks. He knows how to captivate an audience, and makes very conscious use of his charisma and magnetism. Like many Swedes, he is reserved, but occasionally smiles infectiously. I get the impression that he is very careful about what he reveals despite his openness. The only time he completely lets his guard down is when I show him photographs of pieces he hasn't seen in almost twenty years. He lights up like a kid at Christmas.

Liam is passionate about what he does. Perhaps that's what keeps him going: if he doesn't completely believe in what he does, it loses any meaning.

Even in his teenage years, Liam was a seeker of something he couldn't find in the suburb he grew up in. Instead, like many other kids, he traveled in to town. Stockholm's city centre is quite small, and is completely surrounded by newly-built suburbs. 'Going into town' has been kids' breathing space for several generations. In the 1980s, the gardens at Kungsträdgården were the usual meeting-point.

"People would mill around with fat ghetto blasters, hip-hop clothes, spray cans and sketches. The atmosphere was amazing – sometimes thousands of people would show up! That's where Swedish hip-hop was born," says Liam decisively.

"That's where we'd meet, then go to the

Merly – Norrköping, 2004

Gröna Lund amusement park and play arcade games, like Dragon's Lair. Our life was arcade games, graffiti and seeking freedom."

It was at Kungsträdgården that Liam met **Ziggy**.

"He must have been one of the very first writers in Sweden. Not only that: he was the best. Nobody could even touch him. We sketched a lot together, and inspired each other. I owe a lot of my development to him."

Liam started taking graffiti increasingly seriously around 1986.

"We were up all night and slept in the daytime. We explored the subway tunnels and sewer system underneath the city. When Transit authority staff found us in the train yards, they really got a surprise," chuckles Liam.

Where did the name Merly originate?

"At first it came from Merlin. Then it became Merley, then Merly. The letters had to be good to write. I haven't changed my name very often, but before that I wrote Lotus. I did one of my first pieces at my school in Hagsätra, on a Sunday in broad daylight. Of course I got caught, and the school called my parents."

That piece, 'Magic', was one of the first really good pieces in Hagsätra. He was already a writer to be reckoned with.

Did you break dance as well?

"The first time I stood on a stage was at a school end-of-term show, and I did electric boogie and some other guys break danced. People thought we were nuts."

Hip-hop was new. Not just to other people;

Liam Norberg, winter of 2005.

Merley – Stockholm, 1986. "I'm still satisfied wit this piece. It rocks! Note the hidden arrow in the beginning of the first letter. At this time we had started to do thicker outlines as well as adding colors on the silver fill-in."

Merley – Stockholm, 1986

hip-hoppers themselves had to explore and discover the phenomenon.

"We tried caps from other types of paint until we found the right ones. **Disey** had a contact at the Auto-K storehouse, and sometimes we'd buy boxes of cans at wholesale prices. But we didn't get hold of all cans that way," says Liam with a sly smile.

"The Beckers cans were the worst. They were runny. So were Alcro, especially in cold weather. Quick were ideal, but very rare. We painted our Adidas New-York overalls with spray stencils and did outlines in pen."

"I never thought I'd get caught! Ever. The decision to become a criminal was quite deliberate."

In the mid-80s, Liam joined the graffiti crew Stuck On Graf. The group was influenced by **Bando** from Paris and **Shoe** from Amsterdam (who were members of the Chrome Angels and Crime Time Kings), as well as writers from Copenhagen. Stuck on Graf consisted of some of the best writers in Stockholm: Disey, Ziggy, **Dhemn**, **Razor**, **Zack** and Merly.

"We carried on for about a year. Then Disey and Ziggy started Stargate Crusaders, Zack and me were the Can Patrol, and then we had a crew called The Graffiti Angels, which sounds a bit too close to Chrome Angels," giggles Liam in delight.

This was Liam's best stylistic period. His pieces were extremely pure, and he was one of the best writers in Stockholm. However, he is not as famous as Disey and Ziggy, perhaps because he was not as active as them.

For several years in the mid-80s, violent riots would break out in Kungsträdgården in late summer. Large groups of youths were herded through town by the police, breaking plate-glass windows, plundering shops and writing tags on the way. These riots differed from those of the 1960s protest movements in that they were not politically motivated, but possibly had more to do with boredom, conflict between police and young people and a general urge for protest.

"Between 1985 and 87 we were in Kungsträdgården, the riots were on, and there was that lawless night on Götgatan when the police were on strike. A protest march went out of control and hundreds of youths were running around smashing windows."

Were you in on that?

"I'm afraid so. For ten years, I maintained that the Kungsträdgården riots had the same elevated status as the 1960s protest movements, but what were they really? A few people throwing bottles at police horses to start a riot."

You mixed with the top graffiti writers of the 80s. What was your life like?

"We led a very simple life. We stole food because we had no money. All we wanted was to be the best at graffiti. It was hard to work once you'd experienced the freedom of just going out with your crowd whenever you felt like it. Mostly you'd hang around in your suburb. It was a mix of people doing something in hip-hop or martial arts."

The circle around Stuck on Graf was notoriously arrogant. If you were a toy, there was no point in even trying to talk to them. To many, they were gods, unreachably cool and best of the best.

"I had a lot of attitude. Well, we were teens. When you're a kid, you think you know it all. And you had to be more daring than others. But it's not good to have too much attitude. I was a very bad example. But graffiti wasn't to blame for my downfall. Graffiti is an extreme form of seeking. Often, you can't afford paint. This can lead into the criminal world. You don't think about that. You pass one threshold, then another. I wanted to change the world. But criminals aren't the ones who change the world: people who know how the world works do."

Liam's pieces brim with attitude. Lines, fill-ins and lettering are done with great care, and betray an arrogant, even threatening, character.

"It's all for the sake of the piece. One of the points was to express yourself through the piece."

How many did you make?

"Many. We bombed line 19, from Hagsätra to the centre of town. Mostly with tags and throw-ups. There was a lot of bombing during those years. Zack and I did an MZ piece on a subway train in Hagsätra. I saw it at the Central Station later. It felt unreal. I think it was one of the first train pieces in Sweden."

Weren't you ever afraid?

"Sure, nervousness is part of the experience. It becomes like a drug. But later, I discovered I could get the kick doing legal stuff, like martial arts."

Was graffiti a kick because it was illegal?

"It was a lifestyle more than a temporary kick. It was about being the best."

In 1986, a movie about youth violence was made in Stockholm. Liam's graffiti buddies Disey and Ziggy told him the film crew were looking for actors. Liam auditioned to do a jump kick on a punk rocker. Titled **Stockholmsnatt** (Stockholm Night), it was possibly the first Swedish movie to depict martial arts. Getting a leading part was like having a dream come true, says Liam.

In 1987, with several other writers, Liam traveled to a jam in Västerås. He was nabbed outside a shop by two security guards, accused of shoplifting. His friends got him free, but the guards managed to keep a bag, containing Liam's blackbook. In the book were photo-

X-science – Hall prison, circa 1997. "I made this piece in the culverts under the Hall prison. It says X-science, where X means the unknown. But the bibel says you should not depict the divine, today I would not paint the Statue of Liberty."

graphs of Liam and several friends, and they quickly decided that it may be wise to avoid the jam. Instead, they hid out on a scaffolding all night.

"We almost froze to death, because it was in the middle of winter. We felt sure the police would be checking all the trains to Stockholm, the next morning, we took a train in the other direction, to Oslo in Norway."

Penniless, they went to the Swedish embassy in Oslo and were given money for food and the train trip home. But the train wasn't leaving until the following day, and instead of food they bought film so they could take pictures of graffiti.

Perhaps the loss of his blackbook contributed to Liam's loss of interest in graffiti. He continued in the movie business and joined the Swedish Tae Kwon Do team at the age of 18.

"At the same time, I took the step into crime. With that, I left graffiti."

Liam starred in the movie **Sökarna** (Seekers), which premiered in February of 1993, but by then he was in jail for robbing an armored transport van. He was sentenced to ten and a half years. As it turned out, the plot of the movie (see inset) wasn't exaggerated. The character Liam played was close to his own reality. In total, he served about six years.

Both *Sökarna* and *Stockholmsnatt* became cult movies for generations of young people. The sequel to *Sökarna* has been filmed, but its distribution has been hampered by great problems.

The myths about Liam still flourish: what was he going to do with the money from the robbery?

He demurs without losing his friendly air.

"I don't know if we should get into that. But obviously, during the criminal part of my life, I lived on illegally-gotten money."

Weren't you frighteneded of the consequences of being a criminal?

"I never thought I'd get caught! Ever. The decision to become a criminal was quite deliberate. I wanted to decide over my life and lead the life of my dreams."

"Graffiti was a lifestyle more than a temporary kick. It was about being the best."

In Sökarna, you appear as a very cold and unpleasant person. Was this what you were like?

"When you become a criminal, you constantly cross new thresholds. Finally, you feel invulnerable. But you can't commit a crime without forcing away your compassion for the other person. Finally your empathy disappears. Me and the people I frequented built up defenses for our actions: 'Society is unjust, politicians are liars, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.' These were the arguments to justify our criminal actions."

How did you regain your empathy?

"I didn't understand that I was a cold person until I looked at myself. Now, ten years later, I know how that affected me. I haven't stopped seeking, but now I test things and see how they measure up against the bible. I had no motive to obey the law before I gained my faith, because now I want to obey God. You need a lot of strength to keep to the road. I have failed many times. But I've turned back and admitted my weaknesses."

How did it feel going from invulnerability to be sentenced to ten years?

"Unreal. I thought I was so intelligent and ultra-professional. But I'm grateful that it happened. Otherwise I don't know if I'd be alive today. Sometimes we must traverse great difficulty to become humble to the truth."

Apart from his work with the film company

Crime, 1986. "You can see the inspiration from the Danish style in the letters. It was Zack who made the character."

Rock Zet – Stockholm, 1986
"I like the piece, although the letters are not as good as I remember them to be. Zet was a friend of mine from Hagsätra who died in a car accident back then. We formed the crew MZ, which I later wrote together with Zack."

Patrol – Stockholm, 1986. At the famous Fryshuset tunnel, the first hall of fame in Stockholm. Photo Nico Cleyndert.

TCP, The Can Patrol – Stockholm, 1986. Photo Nico Cleyndert.

Public Art, Liam is mainly an evangelist today. He travels around Sweden talking about his life and the biblical message in universities, schools, congregations and churches.

His interest in spirituality began in the 80s. With Zack and Ziggy, he not only looked into graffiti, but also the esoteric, the occult and shamanism. Nowadays, he has distanced himself from that, and talks a lot about his faith and God.

"Of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." Liam often quotes the bible in our conversation, and talks – preaches almost – about his faith.

"When we accept Jesus, we open to the spirit of God. It's not okay to live a lie, it's not okay to lie, it's not okay to rob armored transport vans. A lie is a lie. When I came out of prison, I was what some people call saved. I understood that people weren't going to forgive me, so I sought forgiveness in God. The Commandments are there because God wants the best for us, but also because we must be conscious of our sin. To commit a sin is to miss the point of your life. That goal is important, because if the goal is the wrong one, you've made the trip in vain."

Isn't there a risk that attaining the goal leads to emptiness?

"No, because if you let God in, you know where you're going. I've never felt a strong connection to the world I live in. To dare to be the one you are, to dare to breach what society thinks of as normal, may be the best thing about hip-hop. That's exactly what happens when you take God into your life. I've never been afraid of trying new things. You expose yourself by doing a piece. Nobody can deny that what someone does in a tunnel at four in the morning represents a greater sacrifice than some other people's art does. But graffiti contains the same impulses as art, the same seeking, the same kicks, needs and confirmations. You want to be appreciated, seen, loved. We all have gifts. Everyone has a deep need to express themselves, and when you haven't got the space to do that, other forms of expression occur."

Movies starring Liam Norberg

Stockholmsnatt (Stockholm Night)
The movie *Stockholmsnatt* was made in 1986. It concerns young **Paolo Roberto**, and his need to make a final decision: to stop using violence or be trapped in an endless spiral of violence. Many important Swedish hip-hop pioneers appear in the movie: Disey, Ziggy, Merly, Razor, Dhemn, **Done 12**, **Quincy Jones III**, **Cherno**, **Pop C** and others. The movie was financed by Swedish Telecom in their campaign against vandalism. The actors traveled around Sweden to various schools and discussed the effects of violence. But the movie also popularized graffiti and martial arts in the remotest corners of the country, spurring the so-called kicker trend. It has been referred to as the most counter-productive anti-violence project ever.

Sökarna (Seekers)
Sökarna is a dark and twisted story about a group of friends making their way into crime and drug abuse. It is an extremely bleak and pessimistic depiction of a society that can no longer cope with its vulnerable citizens. Liam plays the main character Jocke, and like *Stockholmsnatt*, *Sökarna* became a cult movie to many young people.

Blodsbröder (Blood Brothers)
The movie *Blodsbröder*, starring Liam Norberg, will premiere in 2005.

B3s – Waszaw 2005. Graffitiwriters in Waszaw are facing harder times as the city is increasing it´s surveillance on train yards and city walls.

Warsaw - Paradise Lost

Twenty years ago, Poland was caught in the iron fist of the Soviet Union. Now, after fifteen years of independence, the country is a member state of the European Union. The capital city Warsaw has been known in graffiti circles for some time.

Text: Torkel Sjöstrand

As early as the mid-90s, rumors abounded about Warsaw as a paradise for train writers. It was said that you could spend hours in the train depots, that the cleaning crew shared their coffee with you and that rail workers would nod in appreciation if they encountered someone painting the train. UP had a closer look and found a city in a state of flux.

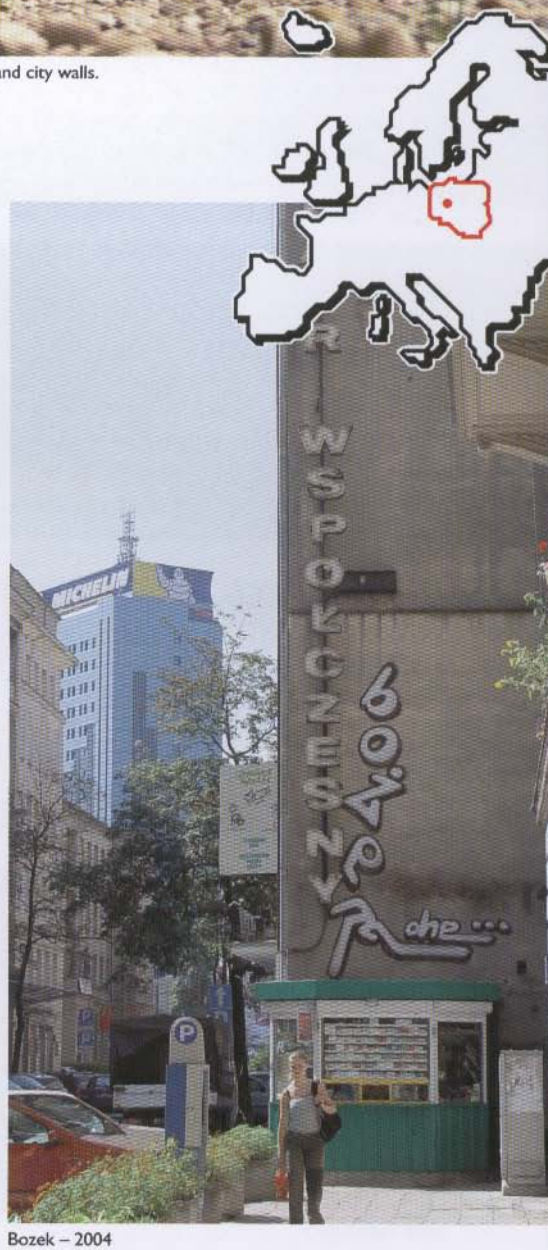
The Warsaw graffiti scene flourished at the turn of the century, but has gradually been emptied since 2002. Many older writers have quit or substantially cut down on their writing. The new crews that have appeared are described as disrespectful and lazy by their elders.

"There is no fresh blood in most new Warsaw writers. If it's about trains, nobody wants to spend a few hours on checking spots. They just wait for someone to take them and show them how, where and what to do," says a Warsaw writer who wishes to remain anonymous. The tone sounds resigned, but similar views are doubtless aired within the majority of graffiti circles. The 'problem' with beginners, or toys, is ever a conversation piece among more established writers, and the Warsaw graffiti scene is not noticeably different in that respect. It is certainly not the young and new writers that are killing graffiti in the city. In later years, the city of Warsaw has started to arm itself, one sign being the increased number of police in the streets. There is no vandal squad, but a graffiti-related arrest often leads to a house search. The red commuter trains, once such easy pickings, are under tougher surveillance, with guards sometimes sitting in the trains overnight. The Warsaw subway, which has apparently not been painted more than some 30 times in its history, is a monstrous camera-monitored system, with a small police station annexed to every station.

Apart from that, one of the greatest changes is the efficient buffing of graffiti. It is increasingly unusual for commuter trains to travel with pieces still on them.

"It's good from one side, because no shitty panels are running and there is no problem with finding a clean train to paint on," says a graffiti writer trying to find a bright point in this new situation. It is an ironic truth.

Warsaw writers seem to be heading for harder times, which may not necessarily spell



Bozek – 2004

Kets, Form painted on a commuter train in 2004

the end of graffiti in the city. The situation is similar to that faced by Stockholm graffiti writers in the late 90s, when the extremely hard pressure against graffiti resulted in a closely-knit, vital graffiti scene, and the number of writers grew rather than fell.

The Warsaw graffiti scene is one of the youngest in Europe. Influences for the first graffiti pieces came from German and Czech visitors to the city in the early 90s. Once Scandinavian and French styles added themselves to the mix, Warsaw writers developed their style with impressive speed. Now the city boasts a vast number of practiced writers, who are neither short on technique or style. From that point of view, Warsaw graffiti is very much alive.

For a better insight into Warsaw graffiti we recommend a visit to the city, or why not look at the following websites:
www.catchme.pl
www.flixy.org

Trops, Runslid – Commuter train, 2003

Swet – Commuter train, 2004

Chick – Commuter train, 2003

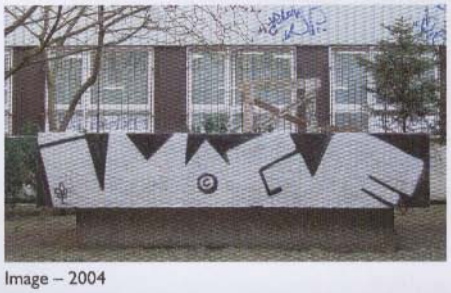


Image – 2004

Meat – Commuter train, 2004

Never ending story

Kfc's – Warzaw metro, 2004

Tna – Commuter train, 2004

Tais, Chick – 2004

B3s – 2004

Uran – Commuter train, 2004

Pyer, Fresh, Rety, Kocie, Zige – 2004

Never ending story

Vim, Fame

STOCKHOLM WALLS

Hell, Gree

Adao

Fame – Subway station Rådmansgatan

Hina, Wood, Nug

Läds, Clone

Oiks – Subway station Zinkensdamm

Uzer, Kzoe, Penso, Fins

Per

Cnr, Cnr, Phik, Woman, Biss, Dirte, Noves

Vandal – Subway train

Que, Uze – Subway train

STOCKHOLM TRAINS

Whel – Commuter train

Uze – Subway train

Hte, Pol – Subway train

Hez – Subway train

Fame – Commuter train

Nick – Subway train

Fame – Subway train

Beor – Subway train

Ment – Subway train

King – Commuter train

F-ups – Subway train

Jues – Commuter train

Jama – Subway train

Shad, Info, Pubse, Whel – Commuter train

Inch, Nine, Get, F-Up – Gothenburg

SWEDISH WALLS

Bong, Cunt – Gävle

Kais, Ollio, Casan – Gothenburg

K.10 – Alingsås

Ske – Scania

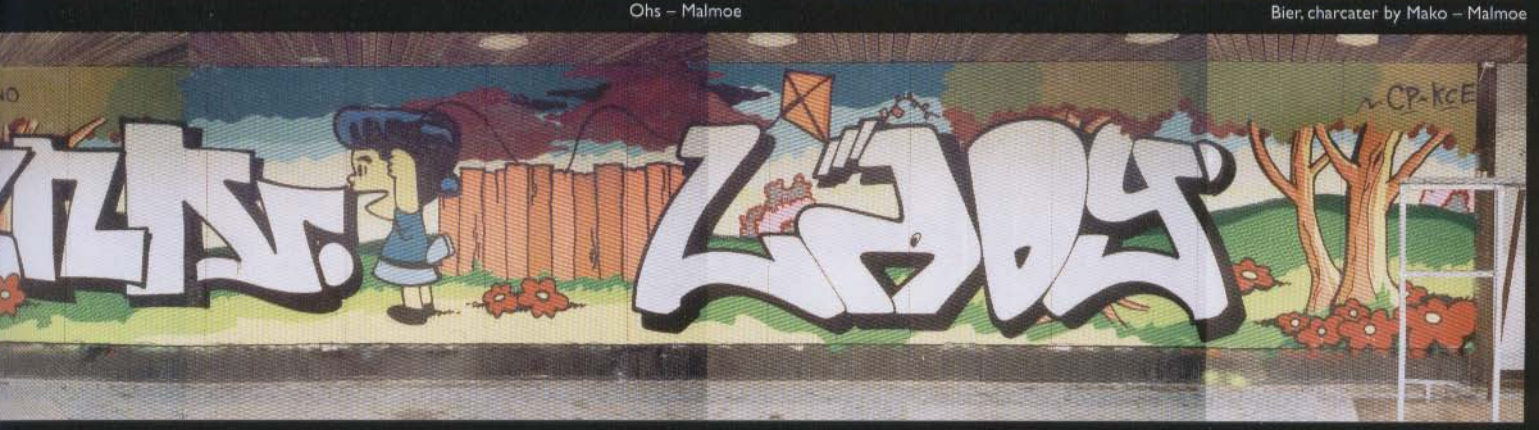
F.Ups – Gothenburg

Jinx – Gothenburg

Rider, Casan, characters by Kongo – Uppsala

Ohs – Malmoe

Bier, charcater by Mako – Malmoe



Bingo, Pynk, Lady – Gothenburg

F-ups, Yeah, Jinx – Gothenburg

SWEDISH TRAINS

Stick, Vim, Ner – Scania commuter train

Cock, Vein – Freight train

Klös – Interregional train

Ashe, Wher – Freight train

Lenox, Ofice – Freight train

Ximer, Mr One – Freight train

Nuek – Long distance train

Roots – Bridge train

Vifl –Long distance train

Otur – Freight train

Ment – Vätter commuter train

Cunt – Regina train

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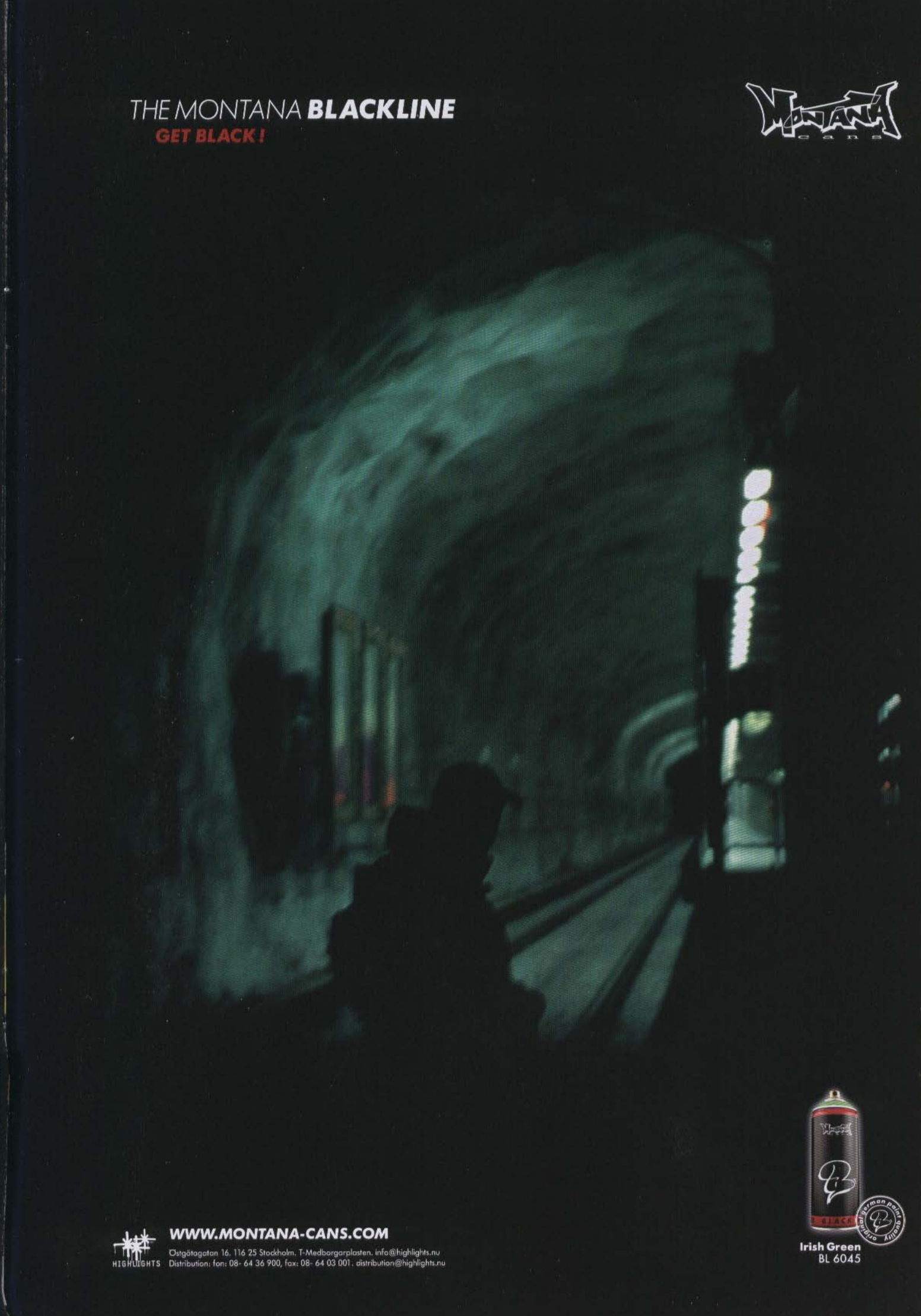

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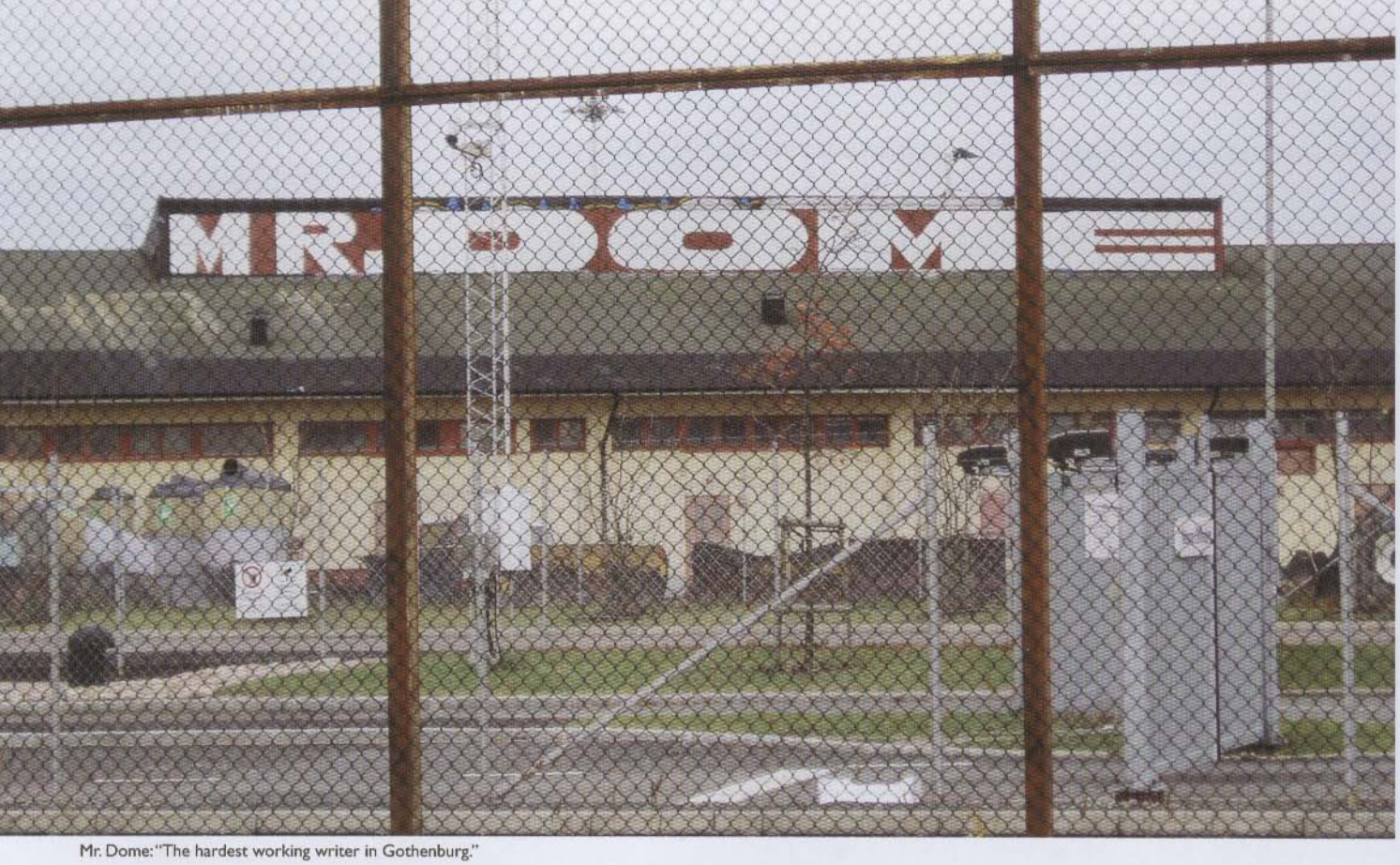


Mr. Dome: "The hardest working writer in Gothenburg."

Return of The King

During the 90s, most Gothenburg writers concentrated on big color productions. Dys, Smak, and later Punk and Ppxe all worked hard to keep the heritage of the 80s bombers alive. But there's nothing like a classic. One of the city's legends has returned to show how it can be done. The name Dome is everywhere in sight, bombed systematically all city. Dome has chosen not to be interviewed. He seems to be too busy. Bombing is a full-time job.

Kid: Coming back after such a long time and just taking over the whole city with his tags and throw-ups is totally cool. Rumor has it that he bombed even more back in the day, but I can't believe that's possible. His way of bombing is special: he can do *one* tag and then just a wave for the rest of the block. It's like the destruction is as important as being up there. He doesn't just have tags in town, but in most of the neighboring areas as well. You're as certain to see one of his tags somewhere out in the forest as you are in town. You often see that he returned as soon as he got buffed. The calligraphy cap has found its one true master.

X-man: He never ceases to amaze me. I think of Dome as part of the city. He came back in the right time, when Gothenburg needed bombing, and he has it all over all the hip oldschool biters.

Punk: During my years as a Gothenburg graffiti writer I have never witnessed a greater bomber than Dome. Since he made his comeback about a year ago he has consistently and thoroughly bombed Gothenburg, up to the point were I rarely find myself walking a street or neighborhood that he hasn't already bombed. There is no fancy stuff, absolutely no doing-it-for-the-photo about him, just straight-up classic good-old-school style. Almost identical tags, done over and over and over again. What I respect the most about Dome is that he's constantly putting in work, grinding out his tags and throw-ups night after night. He is the hardest working writer in Gothenburg, and we should all be thankful for what he does for this city. Dome is all-city, all-out king.

Lady: It's easy for a writer to get a bad conscience in Gothenburg, especially if you're too scared to get out on the streets. It would take a lot for someone to get their ass in gear and take over the bombing scene in town. Dome can feel pleased with himself. From a trend perspective, he's come back just in time. Oldschool is at its trendiest among writers all over Europe. Dome is really convincing. He's bombed Gothenburg to bits, just like in the good old days. A real Swedish oldschool hero who doesn't give a shit about zero tolerance or fashion – he just bombs. Gothenburg has had great bombers like **Dys** and **So**, but Dome can quite justifiable call himself King Dome.

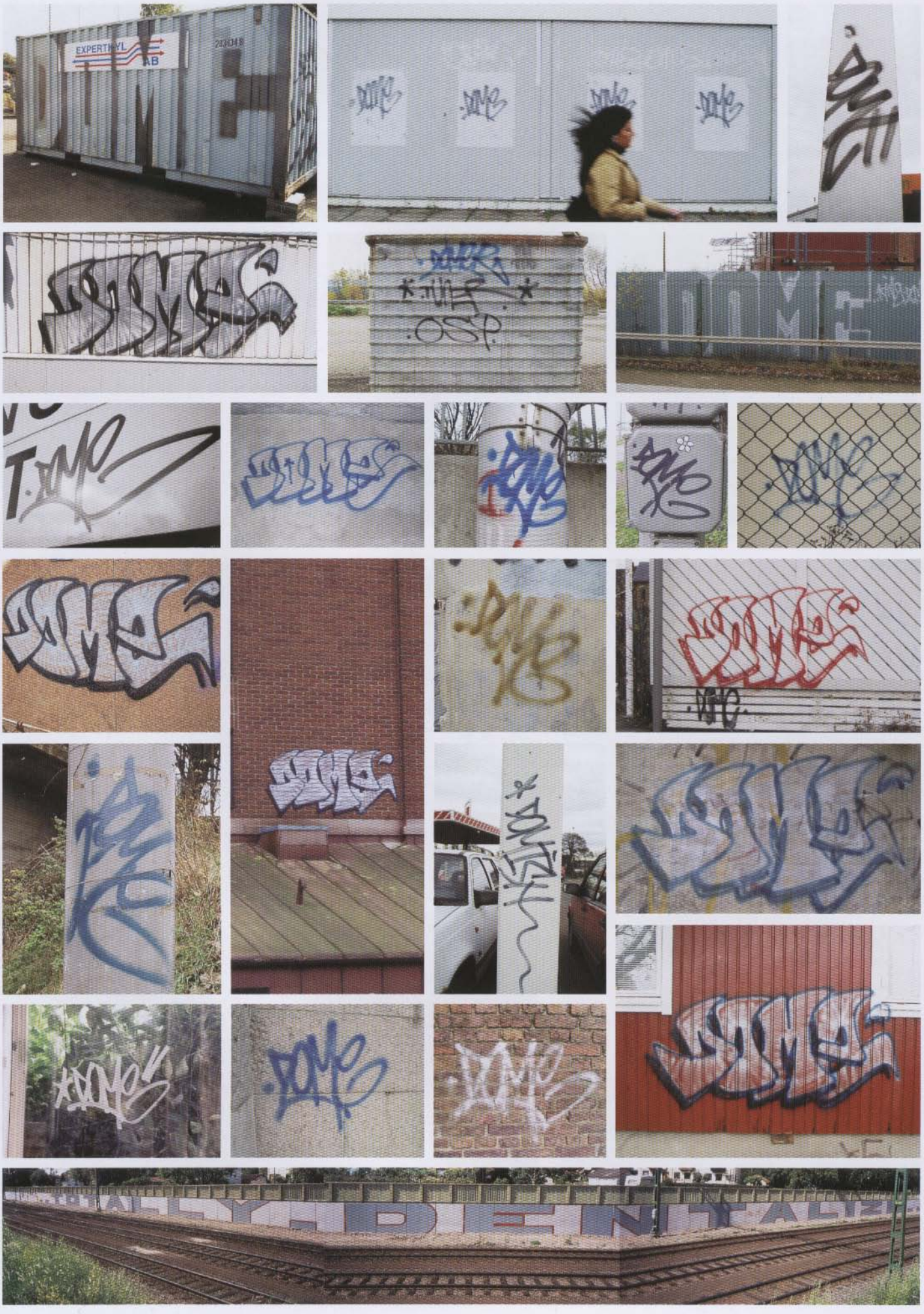
Håkan B och Anders P vs Dome. Dome challenge two members of the Gothenburg vandal squad.

Bodé characters by Dental

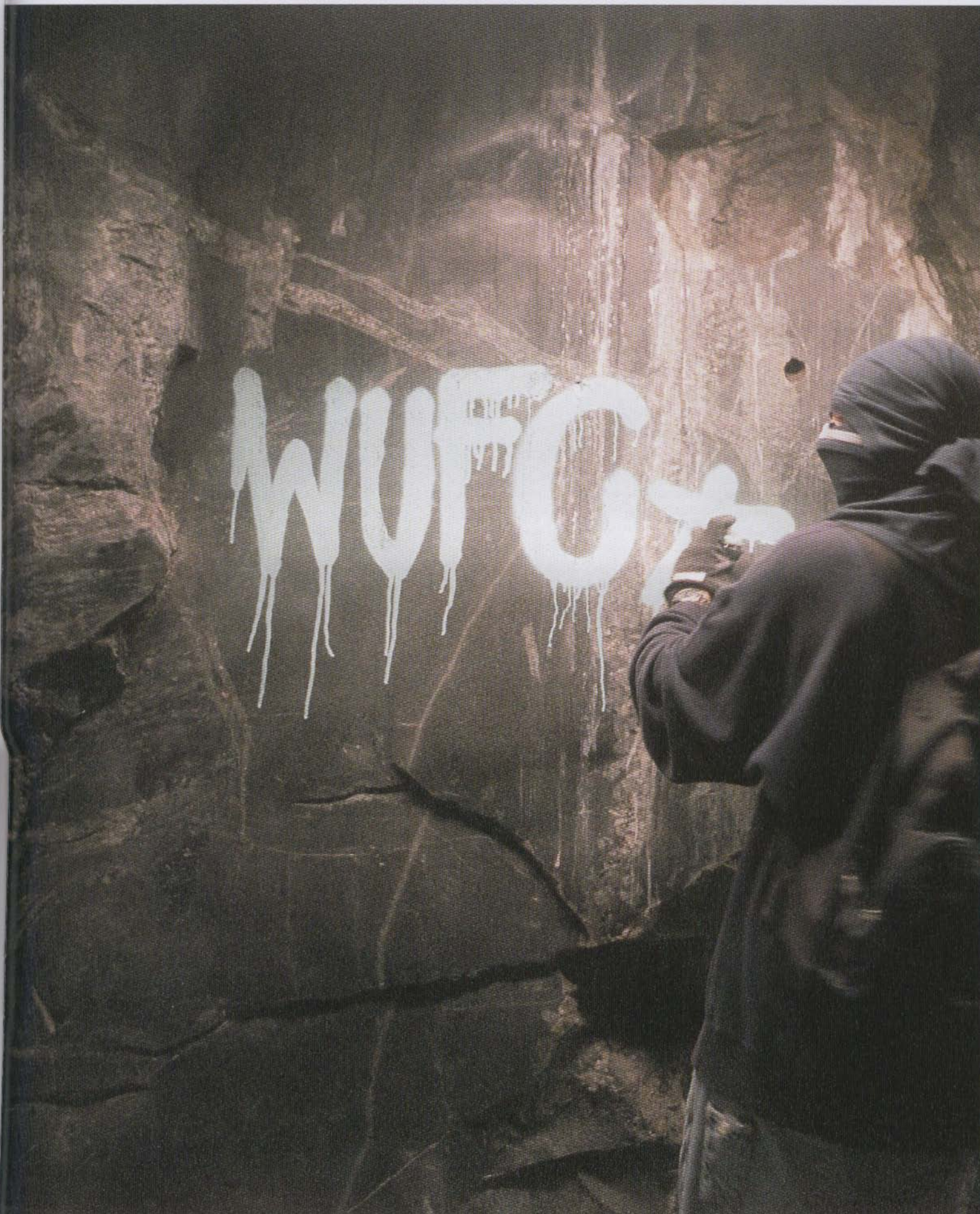
Dentalizm

Dome

Dome


EXPERTVYL
AB
DIE

The book about WUFC



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Oskar Korsár moved to Stockholm to paint trains, but ended up in fine art. "I think a well-made, attractive piece is the best way to reach an audience." he says.

"Innovative characters are boring"

In the mid-1990s, Oskar Korsár became better known as Moer, an original character painter and a member of the Norrland crew NG, from the North of Sweden. After studying graphic design and illustration, he spent a year working as an illustrator, and then turned to fine art. In the past two years he has managed to fit in two individual exhibitions, and sold all works on show on both occasions.

Text: Malcolm Jacobsson

Oskar Korsár makes large drawings containing a multitude of thinly-inked lines with an old-fashioned nib pen that he dips into an inkstand. His images are far removed from contemporary installation art, in which ideas often supersede aesthetic experience. Graffiti mainly deals with form, the goal often being to produce as attractive works as possible. It is hard to discern graffiti influence in Korsár's pictures, but he still wishes to produce beautiful work.

"Today, aesthetics are considered ugly. Art has become so intellectualized and boring that people are getting tired of it. But the tide is turning now; I think a well-made, attractive piece is the best way to reach an audience."

Korsár made his first graffiti sketches in 1988, when he was eleven.

"I took turns with a friend skateboarding around the school hall, and in the meantime, the one who wasn't skateboarding would produce a sketch. We looked up to this older guy who was into Kung Fu and weapons, and according to rumor, he was into graffiti too. I lived out in the forest in Delsbo, in the North of Sweden."

When Korsár turned thirteen, his family moved to the somewhat larger town of Umeå in Norrland. There he formed the crew New Fresh Generation with two friends.

"We wanted to do real burners and decided I should do characters. Since then I haven't done much lettering. A few years later, I started hitch-hiking to Luleå to paint with **Slak**. He got me into NG crew at the Hultsfred Festival [the biggest rock music festival in Sweden], I think it was in 1994."

You haven't produced typical graffiti characters.

"The only way to acquire a position in the graffiti world was to produce new, weird styles – that's NG's forte. Apart from that, it wasn't really cool writing up in Norrland. But I've reevaluated it all in later years. Now I think the best characters that have ever been done are **Kaos**' comic-strip characters. Innovative characters are boring, but comic characters seem fresh."

What was appealing about graffiti?

"Togetherness – it was magical, beautiful and exciting, a fitting way to be cool."

What appealed to you most – the excitement or the creativity?

"It was the perfect meld. When **Ribe** turned 30 recently, I was thinking that everyone who was there was original in some way. That's the beautiful thing about graffiti: it was the only youth culture that encouraged originality, both pictorially and personally."

Korsár moved to Stockholm the day after he finished high school, as several older members of NG had done previously. He intended to live on benefits and paint trains.

"I wanted to get away from small-town life and paint the real trains. It felt as if we had done everything there was to do in Umeå."

But not many trains got painted. Korsár grew tired of the train-painting life and tried to move on.

"Many writers I met had given up hope and didn't care about getting busted. Time caught up with them. They'd got older; some of them had mental or social problems. Graffiti usually only works for a few years, when you have a youthful glow. Graffiti is hard and to-the-point, but with time it gets too complicated."

"Small"

Oskar Korsár at work with his nib pen.

Korsár's pictures progressively grew too intricate to suit his own idea of graffiti. One older member of NG had got into the Konstfack school (University College of Arts, Crafts and Design), and Korsár lodged with a classmate of his. They drew a lot together, and Korsár was encouraged to apply to join the College.

Was graffiti useful to you at Konstfack?

"Yes, of course. Mainly it's vital to develop something of your own. The others at school hadn't learnt that biting stuff off is a mortal sin. As a writer, that's one of the last things you wanted to be accused of."

Did you get bited at school?

"I get ripped off now. But I don't see it as a problem – biting is a form of flattery. It's worse if you're the one doing the biting."

With a few close friends who shared his naïvistic view, Korsár formed a loose crew at the school.

"We brought the graffiti mentality to school. We were pretty annoying, took a lot of space and accused people of biting. I think we introduced that term into the art and design world."

Korsár spent three years at college and passed his Bachelor's degree. He could have stayed on for two more years to get a Master's degree, but chose to stop. He had already started working in tandem with his studies.

After college, he worked as an illustrator for a year.

"It was great fun for a while. I had a lot of political ideas about illustration. I wanted to be subjective rather than objective. If I was given an article to illustrate, I would do my own take on the story rather than illustrate what the journalist had written. Most journalists put a lot their own values into what they write. You need an illustrator to contribute his own values as a counterweight. It's too easy to think that newspapers publish the truth."

"Bad Weather"

Korsár had a standing contract with the weekend supplement to Dagens Nyheter, Sweden's biggest morning paper. It provided him with a steady income, but despite this, he resigned after a year.

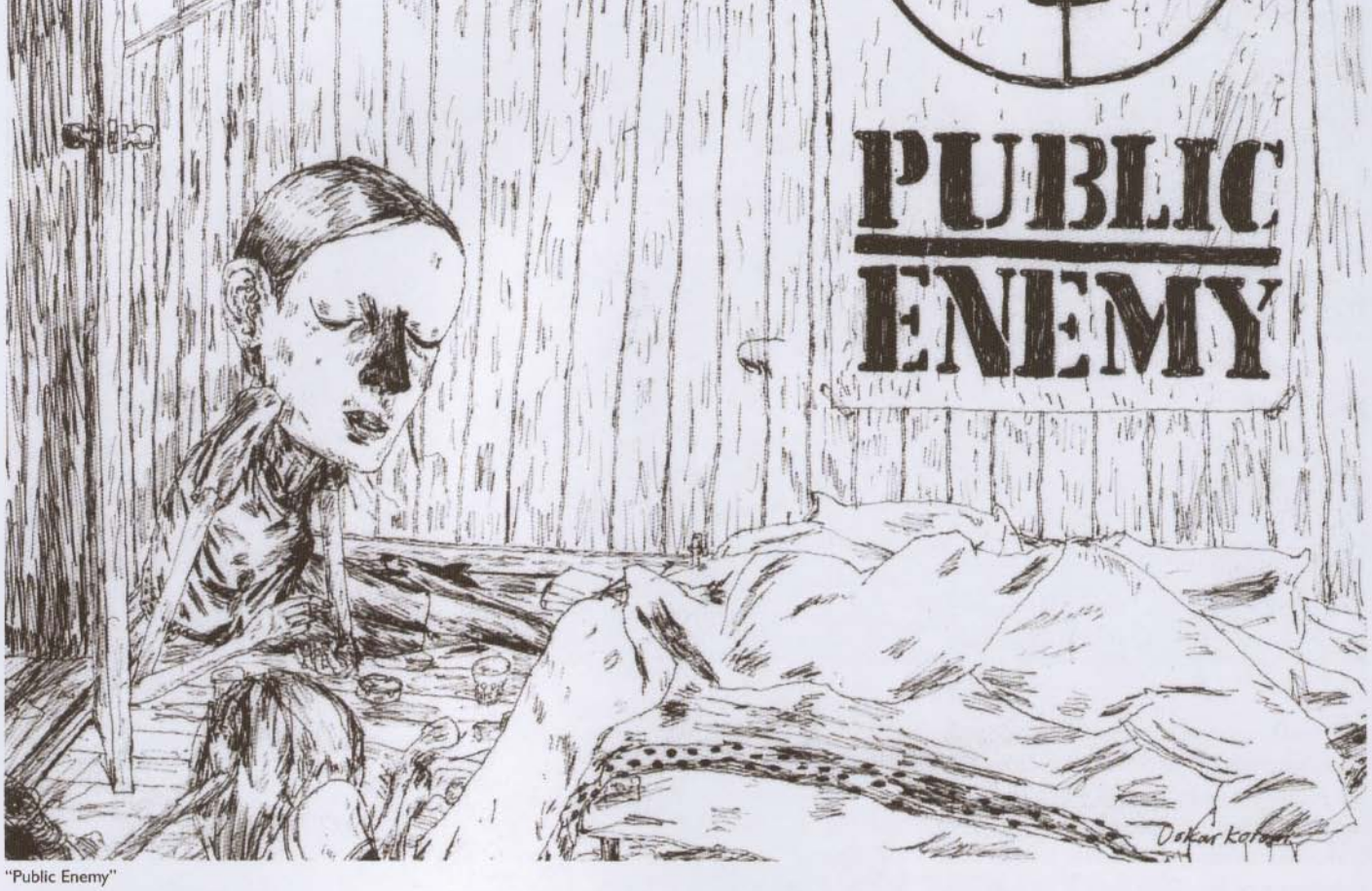
"We brought the graffiti mentality to school. We were pretty annoying, took a lot of space and accused people of biting."

"I didn't want to be the guy who draws in Dagens Nyheter."

Korsár didn't enjoy being an illustrator. He often thought the jobs were silly and boring. He began to invest more into his own work, contributing to an exhibition at the Pictorial Museum of Umeå, and later with his own exhibition at Gallery Alp Peter Bergman.

What made you quit illustration?

"I had to make it clear to people that I am an artist, not an illustrator. There is a huge difference in values in these denominations. An illustrator gets commissioned, whereas an artist works from his own ideas. There's a regrettable view of illustrators as some sort of advertising people. I know I've been turned down for exhibitions on that account. I find it degrading to be thought of as an ad man. It's important to me that my pictures aren't associated with a product. If I'm trying to say something, I don't want interference from some commercial stuff."



"Public Enemy"

What are you trying to say?

"Different observations, often about being a small fish in a big pond, but still being master of your domain. About having to build your own environment."

Korsár's first exhibition received much attention and was well-frequented. He sold all his works. This made him feel more secure as an artist.

Last fall, his second individual exhibition took place, two years after the first, and sold all his works then too. Most of his pieces cost 1,600 Swedish crowns (ca 175 Euros), and the most expensive was 32,000 (ca 3500 Euros) . Half the proceeds go to the gallery owner and a quarter goes to taxes.

How long does the money last?

"Maybe six months. I've got a lot of holes to fill in right now. My paintings get more expensive the more established I become. I'm planning to get more expensive," he grins.

Isn't it a bizarre business?

"Oh, sure, rich people buy your stuff. On one hand, your stuff is displayed to the general public and everybody can see it, but not everyone takes advantage of that. The good thing about illustration was that you reached the broader public."

Are there similarities between the art world and the graffiti world?

"They are both hierarchical, and consist of people who need positive reinforcement."

Umeå is one of northern Sweden's largest cities, counting approx. 100,000 inhabitants.

Konstfack, the University College of Arts, Crafts and Design, is one of Sweden's foremost art and design schools, and competition is fierce to get in. Several writers have studied there.

Oskar Korsár's favorite artist is **James Ensor** (1860-1949), "an impressionist who was out of sync with his time", says Oskar of his idol.

You can find Oskar Korsár's work at **ALP Gallery Peter Bergman**: www.alpgallery.com

Moer a k a Oskar Korsár, Stockholm 1997

"Nude in between door and poster of Matisse"

THE SWEDISH CRAYFISH PARTY

weactivists Benny, Beth, Jason, Chris, Jerry, Alex, Mercedes, Chad and Gino at the crayfish party, Vasquez Rocks , LA.

check out the rest of the crayfish parties at
www.thecrayfishparty.com

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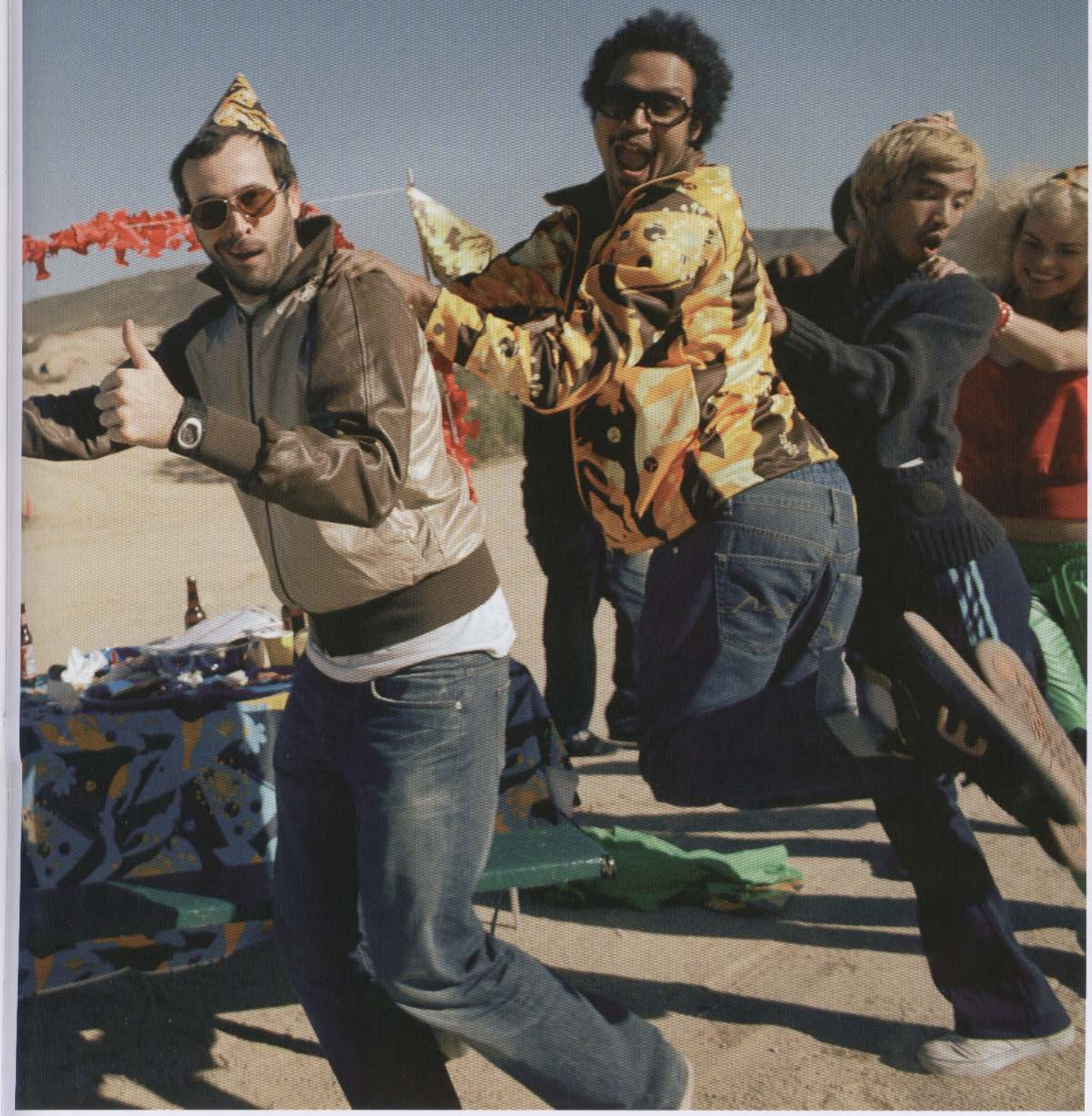
we / jl

The crayfish party is a ritual held every August, meant to compensate the Swedish people for once again being abandoned by summer. In the name of a backward walking creature, exquisitely tasting of salt, the Swedes let each other behave in ways not accepted otherwise. Dressing silly, singing out loud and making out with inappropriate persons is all very well this night. The natives thirst for summer sun is successfully quenched with schnapps, and while saluting the next drink with a ridiculous song, the Swedes shine a greasy smile, looking forward to six months or more of liquid light-therapy.

SKÅL!



Emma at a workshop in Norrköping

More than thirty cities in different parts of Sweden have walls where graffiti is permitted. Read our guide on: www.underground-productions.se.

Graffiti To Be Legalized in Sweden?

Suddenly, after several years of zero tolerance dominating Sweden's graffiti policy, several cities around the country are sprouting legal walls.

Text: Malcolm Jacobson

Graffiti is not intrinsically a criminal act. You can choose to write legally. But in Sweden, graffiti has long been viewed with great suspicion. Those young people who have tried to follow the democratic rules, and asked their local politicians for permission to write on some old concrete viaduct wall, have often found themselves disappointed.

However, in later years something has happened. Today, there are more than thirty walls in different parts of the country where writing is entirely permitted, and other walls exist where writing is allowed on agreement.

One reason for this change is that graffiti writing has become so widespread. When a third of all ninth graders have tried graffiti, it is hard to force watercolors on them instead. Another reason is that the most vocal proponents of zero tolerance have vanished. **Kjell Hultman** was fired from the Transit Authority as a result of suspicions of corruption in the procurement of security guard services. **Björn Hårdstedt** at the Association of Local Authorities was criticized for not having any factual basis for his statements and making personal attacks. He has now no longer made pronouncements about graffiti for a few years. Hultman and Hårdstedt almost managed to perpetuate their negative image of graffiti and resistance to legal walls all over Sweden. The myths they propagated will live on for some time, the most popular ones being "Graffiti leads to drug abuse and serious crime" and "Legal walls are training grounds for vandals".

Criminological research conducted in Sweden shows that graffiti writers are a heterogeneous group. Some are involved in crime, others not.

In connection with the hardening of Swedish legislation against illegal graffiti, the Crime Prevention Authority (CPA) [Brottsförebyggande Rådet] was asked to map graffiti prevention methods. They reached the conclusion that there is no scientific information on the effects of legal walls.

In 2004, the CPA supported four projects related to legal graffiti and five projects mainly linked to cleaning and information on public opinion on graffiti. The purpose was to find out which methods reduce illegal graffiti.

The CPA refers to all illegal graffiti as defacement (klotter), and only the legal painting as graffiti. "We decided that defacement prevention was a priority in 2004," says **Solveig Hollari** of the CPA. "Nobody knows what works if you want to get rid of it. We can lend financial support to try out different methods."

Legal graffiti is still controversial in many cities. It is easier to know what to think when all graffiti is illegal. Once legal graffiti comes into the equation, it is no longer possible to tar it all with the same brush. This is a problem for cleaning companies and others who see graffiti as a nuisance.

Now that more cities are choosing to compromise with graffiti writers, it is hoped that scientists will evaluate the effects of legal walls. Until then, we shall be conducting some unscientific research around Sweden to find the locations of legal walls.

Style battle in Uddevalla, summer of 2004.

Uddevalla Politicians Lend Their Ears

Graffiti writers in Uddevalla have been in discussions with politicians, appeared in the media and run public workshops. This has borne fruit: now they are to receive legal walls.

Text: Malcolm Jacobsson

Two years ago, Uddevalla's legal graffiti walls were closed down and a zero-tolerance policy was instituted.

"I have no idea why they shut the walls down – we were just told it was all over," says **Neo One**, who chose instead to travel to Gothenburg to write. In 2003, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities recommended that Uddevalla close down the walls that the Technical Office previously had okayed for writers.

Since zero tolerance was instituted, Neo One along with about 10 youths aged from 11 to 22 years old have tried to get the town politicians to change this policy.

In October of 2003, they submitted a proposition of walls to write on. The youths have appeared in the press and openly discussed their writing. They have received the support of three council employees who work with young people and the urban environment.

The writers' openness bore fruit. In May 2004, the council decided to approve graffiti, but only once the Technical Office decides which locations and rules apply.

Lucas Eliasson, a 21-year-old writer, has been hired for three months to formulate the rules. His salary is being paid with project funds from the Crime Prevention Authority.

"I meet a lot of people and discuss graffiti. Now us writers have decided on four walls that we want and are going to hand in our proposition to the Technical Office."

In order for the walls not to become forgotten graffiti reservations, the writers plan to apply for funding for workshops and seminars and to invite prominent writers and organize jams.

Between June and November of 2004, a temporary wall was erected by the Bohuslän Museum as a result of a collaborative effort between graffiti writers, the council and the High School aesthetics program. The purpose was to contribute to a change of attitude towards graffiti. Workshops and seminars were held by the wall every week.

What happens if many writers decide to write illegally despite the presence of legal walls?

"Then it won't have worked out the way I thought it would. But you have to dare to try. I don't think zero tolerance works. There wasn't much illegal writing in Uddevalla during the summer months when we had the temporary wall."

Do you want all graffiti to be legalized?

"I don't dislike illegal writers, but I like to take my time. I like work on stuff. Others may like the kick they get out of illegal writing."

The council antiquarian **Carl Casimir** works with art and culture conservation and is one of those who have helped the writers.

How will the Uddevalla graffiti walls be organized?

"I imagine some completely free walls and some regulated ones where groups of young people, a youth center or a school enter into a contract over the responsibility of a wall. The Technical Authority shouldn't have to take all responsibility."

Will these walls appear by the spring?

"I'd like to think so."

Between June and November of 2004, a temporary wall was erected in Uddevalla.

Cultural College to Erect Legal Graffiti Wall in Stockholm

In November of 2004 a heated debate broke out in Stockholm concerning the city's relationship to graffiti, originating with a Stockholm Cultural College's project.

Text: Kristoffer Ekman

The project Megakonst (Mega Art) is to encompass modern lettered graffiti, but will also be open for other large-format techniques. Leading Stockholm politicians, spearheaded by the Social Democrat Party, approved the idea, which spurred the age-old graffiti debate. Critics maintain that allowing graffiti writers to write in some spaces but not others blurs the demarcations.

The proposal has now been tabled, which means that the areas and authorities involved may contribute their views before a decision is reached. We met culture workers **Peter Tucker** and **Cilla Ericson**, with whom the idea originated.

How extensive is this project meant to be?

"The centre of activity is to be the Mega-Yard, an open space by the college grounds by Brommaplan, reserved for large-format works. The lateral wall is to be furnished with plywood boards, and a stage is to be built, connecting to the college's concert hall. As a space for dance and music performances."

How did you get the idea?

"We thought it was sad that so much beautiful street art is dismissed as mere daubing. We can see clear parallels to calligraphy and pop art. For seven years, we have been conducting an experimental painting workshop for teenagers at the college. Many of the young people are interested in painting with spray paint."

How does the future look?

"Firstly, this is a two-year pilot project. However, we think there are many areas of development that the city has earlier missed out on by unilaterally working against graffiti culture. We want to encourage pictorial creation. All young people benefit from learning how to express themselves visually. We want to help young people to find themselves in their creativity. We also think it's important for young people and adults to have an exchange about the nature of public art and the often contradictory expectations and demands of society and young people."

The proposal for the Megayard – a place for legal graffiti in Stockholm.

Fewer Legal Walls in Norrköping

Writers all across Scandinavia know of Sweden's largest area for legal graffiti in the Norrköping Coal Harbor. But now, the area has been reduced.

Text: Malcolm Jacobson

Due to the risk of terrorist attacks, all ports with foreign traffic must see to it that no outsiders can access the port area. Some of the walls now serve as enclosures to the harbor. The walls facing the water are no longer accessible.

"This wasn't done to exclude writers. We're trying to come up with a way to compensate for it," says **Håkan Karlsson**, a leisure worker at the local authority.

Politicians from all walks have expressed their concern over the reduction of wallspace. Karlsson notes that Norrköping inhabitants have taken graffiti into their hearts, as evidenced by old age pensioner groups making study visits to the harbor.

The city has also endorsed courses and other activities to involve youngsters who are interested in graffiti in organized activities.

Norrköping has long been a thorn in the side of zero-tolerance proponents. The city is often used as an example to illustrate that legal graffiti can reduce illegal graffiti. According to Håkan Karlsson, it was so long ago it started that it is no longer possible to say whether illegal graffiti has reduced in Norrköping.

"We keep defacement to a tolerable level," he says simply.

Norrköping is sometimes compared with its sister town, Linköping, which has 500 more reported incidents of illegal graffiti and spends 1.5 million crowns more on cleaning. The same opportunities to write legally haven't existed there.

Norrköping is renowned for its walls, but the city's writers are few and anonymous. Does a large legal wall impoverish graffiti? We asked **Saht**, from Stockholm, about his views on Norrköping graff. He chose to spend three years studying in Norrköping because of the legal wall.

How is Norrköping as a graffiti city?

"Pretty dead, not many people do it. It gets livelier in the summer, when people come over from other localities."

What's the quality like?

"Pretty mixed. Some people are really talented but most of it's not good."

How has the legal wall affected the graffiti scene?

"Most people are interested in productions, but many have broken themselves away from that. Graff can be more open if there's a legal wall. It's nice not to have to be ashamed in school of being a writer. I brought some classmates to the harbor, and they tried their hand at it."

Is there much illegal writing in Norrköping?

"Very little in town. Trains and freight trains are painted sometimes, and a few walls along the tracks. The writers have a good relationship with the local authority. Most agree not to do tags in town."

Is it because of the legal wall that there are so few practitioners?

"It might have had an effect. You have to visit the harbor to look at graffiti."

Relik shaping up his piece at Röda Sten, December 2004.

One of the More Popular Walls in Sweden

Gothenburg is the second largest city in Sweden, counting 700,000 inhabitants, and has been home to several legal walls since the 1990s.

Text: Tobias Barenthin Lindblad

Under the great Älvsborgs bridge at Gothenburg harbor is one of the walls that has been used by writers since the 1980s, when it was deserted. When the old boiler building Röda Sten was reopened as an arts centre some years ago, it was decided to conserve some of the graffiti in the house. Moreover, the Röda Sten Art Association, that rents the building, made a verbal agreement with some writers, who were allowed to paint on the outside walls. For some reason this has become quite widespread and most people see Röda Sten as a legal wall.

"There's never been a legal wall at Röda Sten," says **Per Hållén**, chairman for the association. "The building is owned by the Real Estate, Streets and Traffic department, and they never okayed it."

Recently, the Gothenburg Police graffiti squad issued a press statement averring that Röda Sten is a meeting-place for criminal writers, a haven for drug abuse and that the place is a blight on the city.

Why doesn't the police simply go to Röda Sten and arrest the people writing there without a permit?

"We've never seen the police arrest people writing here. When they do come, it's for coffee and ice cream," says Per Hållén.

The Association itself has no means to stem writing, which occurs in practice every day on the walls. The Röda Sten board has discussed the phenomenon. They hope to reach a constructive solution with the Real Estate Department, other authorities and associations, and the writers themselves.

"Graffiti is a positive part of the area, but we are against vandalism" says Hållén.

How do you make the difference between graffiti and vandalism?

Per hesitates, then answers craftily:

"It's impossoble to tell. It's a matter of opinion."

You can follow the evolution of the walls on the Röda Sten website, www.rodasten.com. New pictures of the latest paintings are published every week. Clearly, Röda Sten is one of the more popular walls in Sweden, not least among those walking through the area, who are given the opportunity to talk to writers. And anybody can see that a lot of people want to work there – go there one Sunday and see for yourself!

Afrika in Norrköping. Legal walls have existed at the Norrköping harbor for 11 years. Before it was reduced in early 2005, the available wallspace was of about 700 yards in length by 2 yards in height.

Deus, Wild, Mustach at Stockholm's only legal wall, situated in Orminge.

Thirty Yards of Wall Is Not Enough

There have been no legal walls in Stockholm in the last four years. In December of 2004, in the Orminge area of town, the community centre erected a thirty-yard wall. Despite the winter cold, it isn't enough.

Text: Malcolm Jacobsson

Graffiti enthusiasts were promised a legal wall in early 2004 if illegal graffiti in the area was reduced. Writer and leisure worker **Niklas Persson** got the support of the community centre and the Crime Prevention Authority. Under his tutelage, nine youths have attended a graffiti school and paid study visits to writers working on exhibitions. Vandalism and illegal graffiti decreased by 46% in 2004, which led to the inauguration of the wall.

"The local police were almost the most supportive. They think that people who want to write legally should be allowed to do so," says Niklas Persson.

The wall was primarily planned for young people in Orminge, but since there are no other legal walls in Stockholm, it has quickly become a popular destination for writers from all over the city. The pressure is already getting to be too much. Niklas says that there is space for twelve people at a time, but sometimes twenty people appear, despite the cold. There is concern in Orminge that visiting writers will not take necessary responsibility for the wall to be kept, which led to rumors being spread on the internet forum whoa.nu that the wall was not legal.

But Niklas says everybody is welcome. "We've spread the word to Stockholm writers not to tag here. We're trying to start a dialog. If this works, more counties will be willing to invest in legal graffiti," says Niklas, who hopes that the wall will be increased by a further thirty yards.

Public Support for Legal Wall in Ljusdal

Ljusdal is a small locality in central Sweden. Since May of 2004, there has been a legal wall here, in a pedestrian tunnel in the middle of the locality.

Text: Tobias Barenthin Lindblad

"Some guys e-mailed the local authority. They wanted a legal wall. They thought there would be less illegal graffiti if there were one. I thought it was fun to see young people take initiative, and met them a couple of times. They suggested the pedestrian tunnel in central Ljusdal," says **Charlotta Netsman**, a local cultural worker. The matter was taken up by the Standing Committee for Cultural Affairs, which decided that a legal wall would be instituted on a trial basis. Once the Committee had made its decision, Charlotta contacted the Road Administration to ask for the use of the tunnel.

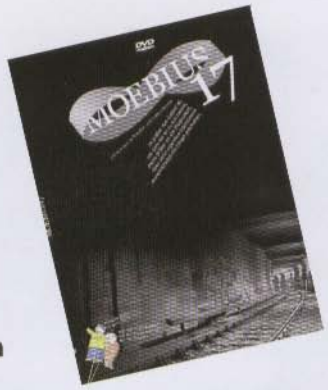
"They were negative. They said that the spray paint would crack the concrete in cold weather. I asked them what sort of paint you could use, but they didn't know."

Having spoken to several people about the effects of spray paint on concrete, and found no objections, she contacted the Road Administration again, and this time they said yes.

The tunnel became legal on a trial basis for a year. It was opened in mid-May 2004, after the local authority arranged to have it whitewashed.

"I got many positive reactions from different people. Of course, there are skeptics too, but they have been far less vocal."

In August of 2004, a train was painted while it halted briefly at Ljusdal station. The painting was discovered the following morning, by which time the train had got to Luleå. The train company chief publicly blamed the legal wall, but Charlotta countered his arguments in the press the next day. "After that, the debated quieted down," says Charlotta, who thinks that this is because the project has had so much public support.



Graffiti Science Fiction

The movie Moebius 17 sees its world premiere at the Rhythm of the Line festival in Berlin this year.

Moebius 17 concerns the hunt for a painted subway car, and how one character gets increasingly mixed up in quantum physics, chasing the train into a fourth dimension.

The Berlin writer **Esher** is one of the two men behind the movie, and describes it as graffiti-science fiction, or a graffiti movie without graffiti.

Esher is still struggling with problems surrounding DVD distribution. German bureaucracy works slowly, and Esher harshly criticizes both the censorship authorities and GEMA (the German Society for Musical Performing and Mechanical Reproduction Rights).

"They should be supporting small-budget film producers like us, but instead they are completely tying my hands. They're only interested in bonding with the film industry."

Despite this, Esher hopes that all the paperwork will be ready for the DVD to be released in mid-April. It will be subtitled in Rumanian, Swedish, Polish, English, French and Spanish.

For more information, visit www.moebius17.de

Einer and Anderer discussing the disappeared subway car.

Rhythm of The Line

Berlin hosts international graffiti film festival

Around 30 graffiti movies will be shown at the Berlin Eiszeitkino cinema between 24th and 28th March 2005, in the Rhythm of the Line festival, where you will be able to see everything from documentaries like Style Wars and Break Out to dramas like Beat Street, Moebius 17 and Bomb the System.

The program and more info can be found at www.rotl.de
Address: Eiszeitkino, Zeughofstrasse 20, by Görlitzer Banhof station, Berlin-Kreuzberg.

"Like mother in pink camouflage", canvas and mural by Lady Pink. All artists have each created one work for the exhibition, and then complemented it with paintings.

"Girls always have to represent something"

At the SubGlob exhibition in the city of Örebro in southern Sweden writers from South Africa, Australia, Holland, Brazil, the USA and Sweden were represented. All of the them were female, but the curator, Pärra Andreasson denies SubGlob to be gender based.

Text: Jacob Kimvall

"In most places where you do graffiti, the nights belong to the men. So you need protection, you need a companion to go with you. Or a weapon. If you're a tiny little woman like me, I've always needed my homeboys. For protection or companionship. Or at least someone to call the ambulance," says **Lady Pink** with a laugh.

According to her, the fact that the nights are controlled by men, and that women must proceed cautiously, is one of many important reasons for the extreme male dominance in graffiti. It can hardly be questioned that writers are almost all boys or men. So when the Örebro arts centre in the late winter of 2005 is putting on the SubGlob exhibition, created only by female writers, this is something of a sensation.

The exhibition can be seen as a manifestation of the fact that not all skilled graffiti writers are men. But the curator, **Pärra Andreasson** a k a **Ruskig**, is not insisting on the fact that the exhibitors are women, or even on the fact that they are graffiti writers either. Instead, in his inaugural speech, he stresses the fact that this exhibition is formed by interesting artists from different parts of the world.

SubGlob has many good and interesting works, often conveying clearly political messages. It is diversified in expression and content. At the same time, I can see no other criteria for selection except that you had to be a graffiti writer, and female. There seems to be no leitmotiv in the selection, no other expressed theme in the exhibition, no clear common in the artists, other than that they have roots in graffiti.

"It's not totally the guys' fault that girls aren't writing. The girls also need to kick some ass as well."

This is not to say that this is a bad criterion for selection; quite the contrary. The lifting up of women in a culture so dominated by men could be presented as political dynamite. So why does Ruskig choose to hide this principle? Perhaps he is worried that the exhibition and works would be overlooked in the general hubbub surrounding the choice of artists.

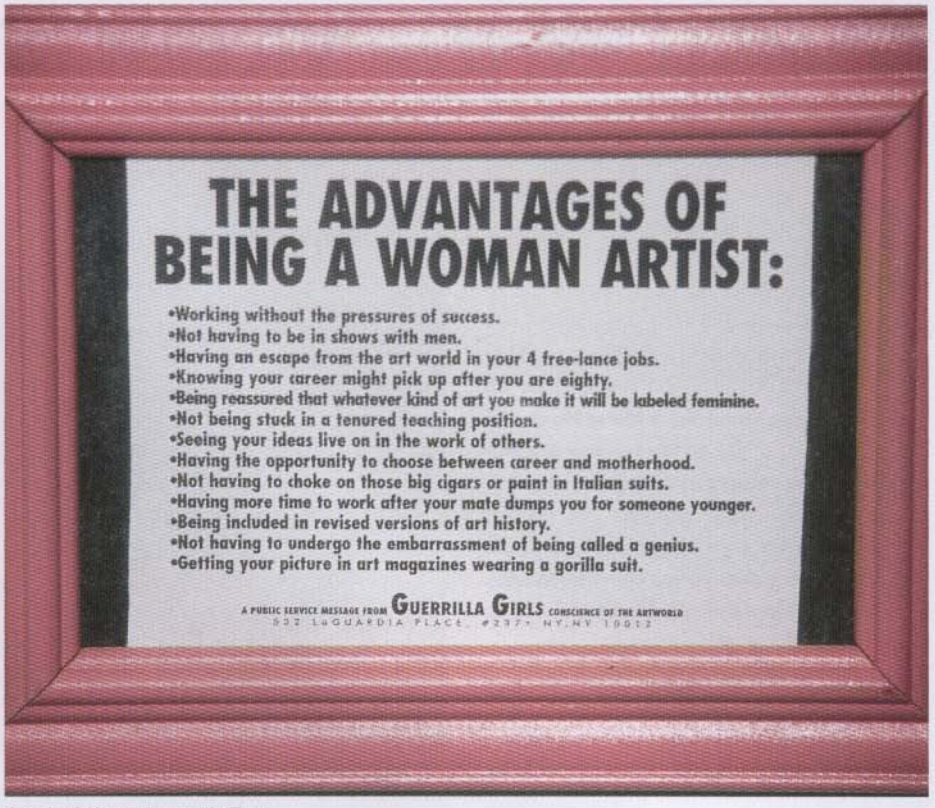
Some people talk of prefix artists: artists who in some way, by their ethnicity, sex, class or direction, divert from the norm. The list can be made long: immigrant artists, black artists, working-class artists. From this point of view, the tradition we write about in UP is an exception, a prefix-direction: graffiti art. And the women in this group get a double prefix: female graffiti artists.

While SubGlob is an exhibition of individual artists, and should not be seen as just an exhibition of female graffiti artists, it is clear that many of the artists define themselves as women, perhaps most prominently **Tash**. Her 'One-Woman Army' is a painting consisting of several different classic graffiti styles, a demonstration of skills.

Like Tash, all artists have each created one work for the exhibition, and then complemented it with paintings. I would like to make it simple and say that they have each made a piece, but actually only **Karma** and Tash stay with straight graffiti, if one can indeed talk of graffiti at an exhibition. The Swedish writer Karma, who is also the youngest of the artists on display, is closest to traditional graffiti. Her painting is also briefly titled 'Karma'. Lady Pink, **Nina** and **Faith 47** work on

"Camouflage Series nr 1, The Snake Eye" by Mickey

Faith 47


THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING A WOMAN ARTIST:
•Working without the pressures of success.
•Not having to be in shows with men.
•Having an escape from the art world in your 4 free-lance jobs.
•Knowing your career might pick up after you are eighty.
•Being reassured that whatever kind of art you make it will be labeled feminine.
•Not being stuck in a tenured teaching position.
•Seeing your ideas live on in the work of others.
•Having the opportunity to choose between career and motherhood.
•Not having to choke on those big cigars or paint in Italian suits.
•Having more time to work after your mate dumps you for someone younger.
•Being included in revised versions of art history.
•Not having to undergo the embarrassment of being called a genius.
•Getting your picture in art magazines wearing a gorilla suit.
A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM GUERRILLA GIRLS CONSCIENCE OF THE ARTWORLD
532 LaGUARDIA PLACE, #237, NY,NY 10012

Guerilla Girls paraphrased by Tash

mixed-media techniques, the former two with a mixture of painting and sculpture. Faith 47 mixes painting, documentary videos and photography and works with a clear social theme.

Like Lady Pink, Faith 47 mentions that it is dangerous for women to move around in a city at night, especially in South Africa, where she comes from:

"If you go bombing in the streets, you're really putting yourself in danger. The rape statistics are very high and there are a lot of gangs and stuff. Generally you don't go out at night at all, never mind to paint graf."

"But I also think we have a problem with media and how it portrays women. I think girls are often just portrayed as sex objects. At least in South Africa, many girls look up to these MTV and Hollywood-type images of Britney Spears and stuff like that when growing up."

"It's not totally the guys' fault that girls aren't writing. The girls also need to kick some ass as well." Faith 47 pauses and shakes her head.

"You have to prove yourself, because you're a girl you get looked at so much more. You can't just hide it in the background, you'll always have to represent something."

In later years, women have been allowed into the New York graffiti Hall of Fame. But interest in the artistic form seems to have been subordinate to the idea of letting women write in the eyes of the arrangers. Says a sarcastic Lady Pink:

"The first year the arrangers called and asked if I could come and paint there and bring my posse of girls. I said 'I don't have a posse of girls, all I know is a bunch of backstabbing bitches.'" She sighs and adds that it isn't true. Pink didn't feel like painting there, but said she knew women who did. The arrangers reserved a 'women's wall', which was taken away only a few days later.

"So I had to go there and personally scream at the organizer, until I got them the wall back. That was the first ladies' wall, where six or seven girls painted and most of them were very good."

I ask Lady Pink if she thinks that the inability of graffiti culture to let women in would be a threat to it in the long run. "Both graffiti and hip-hop culture in general have developed far beyond what anyone could have imagined twenty years ago." she answers. This makes it hard to predict what might threaten it. However, the men can feel threatened:

"We are invading the boys' club. And this is the last of the boys' clubs, otherwise women are everywhere, even in sports locker rooms. This is one of the last stands that they have."

A work by Karma at the SubGlob exhibition

Graffiti Writer Victim of Tsunami

The graffiti writer **Lead** was killed in the tsunami that hit Southeast Asia on Boxing Day. Lead was on Phi Phi Island in Thailand with his girlfriend and son. A friend identified their remains among the dead after the tsunami. Their son was not found.

Lead was 34. He started writing in 1987 in Järna, south of Stockholm. He was a member of HO (Habitual Offenders) Crew with **Dr. D**, and in Full Effect with **Sun**, **Mice**, **Mask** and **Ance**.

Lead was adventurous and traveled extensively.

"He made his own way, made long solo trips abroad, as if to prove he could do it," says Ance. "He didn't like to compromise. If he didn't like a job, he'd quit rather than adapt. He was a humble outsider who wanted to be accepted for who he was."

"Lead usually graffed on the outskirts, but he was really impressed by people who proved that you can write in central locations. He liked mouthy graffiti," says Ance.

"He saw every piece as an adventure, like mountaineering for example," says Mask.

Malcolm Jacobsson

Going to the Norrköping jam on September 4th 2004 and meeting old friends was a milestone for Lead. This was probably his last piece.

Is Concrete Affected By Spray Paint?

One of the main arguments against spraying on walls is that the paint ruins the concrete. But opinions differ, which is why UP spoke to two experts.

Text: Tobias Barenthin Lindblad

Krister Berggren is a construction consultant, and is knowledgeable on protecting and cleaning various surfaces.

Does concrete need to breathe?

"That's a widespread myth in the construction business, but often a thick coat to protect the concrete is better. Modern concrete has such thin pores that moisture doesn't penetrate them."

Concrete is often coated with tight wax or a sugar-based solution so that graffiti can be easily removed. This surfacing also protects the concrete from water, ice and salt.

Bertil Nyman, a bachelor in technology at the Cement And Concrete Institute, points out the difference between good and bad concrete: "Concrete is sensitive to humidity, and in a climate of cold winters, humidity becomes a problem at temperatures below freezing point. It can burst bad concrete. Good concrete is frost-resistant, though, and can take a thick coating."

What is the normal life span of outdoor concrete in Sweden?

"Nobody knows for sure," says Krister Berggren. "High-quality concrete has a very long life span, possibly several hundred years. That's in natural conditions; blasting [a method used in graffiti removal], for instance, can ruin the surface much quicker. Just twenty years ago, concrete had a much shorter life span."

I ask him how concrete is affected by spray paint. Krister hesitates. "I don't like scrawling," he says decisively. He continues: "But no, spray paint doesn't affect concrete."

What wears concrete out most – leaving the paint, or removing it?

"The constant paintings and removals wear it out. Cleaning agents are the worst for concrete surfacing. If you use high-pressure cleaning methods in the wintertime, the water freezes and ice formations can appear."

Krister maintains that you might just as well coat the graffiti with concrete gray paint, which would be the best thing for the concrete. "If graffiti gained acceptance, it could stay on the wall without the concrete taking any damage as such, but I don't think most people would want that."

Quality of Life – The Movie

The first time you heard the term Quality of Life Offences was probably when New York mayor Ed Koch associated it with prostitution, gambling and drug abuse in Style Wars. Quality of Life is also the title for a new American movie about graffiti.

Text: Björn Almqvist

"I always thought that it's a funny thing to lump graffiti together with three card monte, as if like these guys are bringing down the quality of other peoples' life by just hustling and trying to take you for some p-nuts," says **Bryan Dawson**, who has done some of the graffiti shown in the movie.

"Yeah, And I'm fucking more down for a gambler or a prostitute than for **Ed Koch** so, fuck him," interrupts **Brian Burnam**, co-writer of the script and one of the lead parts in the production.

"The name Quality of Life has also a double meaning of what kind of quality your life will have depending on what choices you make," continues Bryan Dawson.

The story takes place in the San Francisco Mission District, and concerns graffiti writers **Vain** and **Heir**, who have the choice between bombing rooftops and doing community service or becoming graphic designers and make money out of their art. The theme is familiar, both from reality and last year's *Bomb the System* (see UP # 26). The criticism of a system that creates an underclass of jailbirds who are guilty of relatively harmless crimes is there, but never quite becomes evident. Instead, the film focuses on relationships and police chases, something Brian and Bryan know only too well.

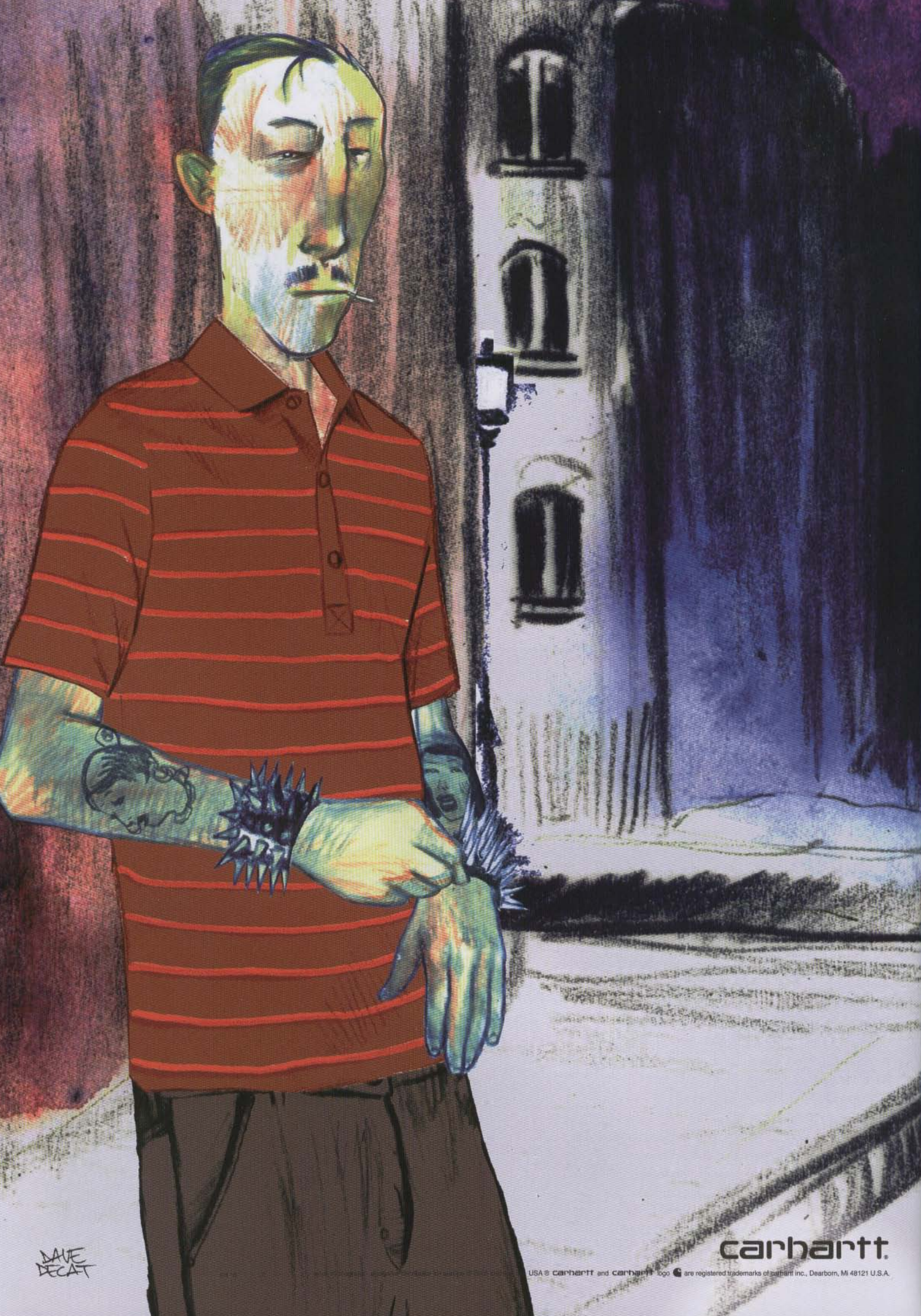
"It's just one chapter in our life. All the scenarios in the film are things that have happened to us or our friends. Older people get shocked and wonder if you really get your door kicked in for writing graffiti. Every writer knows. We're fuckin' rebelling. I'm not gonna sit here and cry about my door getting kicked in, because what I'm doing is telling society to fuck off," says Brian Burnam.

Who is the movie for?

"It's obviously geared towards writers. But it's not only a movie about graffiti, says Brian Burnam. I even got my dad to see this shit. All my life he's been worried about me getting his last name in the paper for doing graffiti. I just had an interview with a paper in Stockholm and last week we were on the front page of the San Francisco Chronicle. It's like, 'what the fuck dad, your name is in the paper, what are you gonna do about it?' His worst fears come true." (Laughs)

Visit: www.qualityoflife-themovie.com for more information about the movie.

Vain and Heir telling society to fuck off



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